

# IRREANTUM

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A Review of  
Mormon Literature & Film

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VOLUME 9, NUMBER 1 (2007)

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And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum,  
which, being interpreted, is many waters.

—1 Nephi 17:5

*Irreantum: A Review of Mormon Literature and Film* is a refereed journal published three times annually (Fall, Winter, Spring/Summer) by the Association for Mormon Letters.

We seek to define the parameters of Mormon literature broadly, acknowledging a growing body of diverse work that reflects the increasing diversity of Mormon experience. We wish to publish the highest quality of writing, both creative and critical.

We welcome unsolicited submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and plays that address the Mormon experience either directly or by implication. We also welcome submissions of critical essays that address such works, in addition to popular and nonprint media (such as film, folklore, theater, juvenile fiction, science fiction, letters, diaries, sermons). Critical essays may also address Mormon literature in more general terms, especially in its regional, ethnic, religious, thematic, and genre-related configurations. We also seek submissions of photos that can be printed in black and white. We welcome letters and comments.

#### SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Please send letters and submissions to [submissions@irreantum.org](mailto:submissions@irreantum.org). If you do not have access to email, mail your text on a floppy disk or CD to Irreantum, c/o AML, PO Box 1315, Salt Lake City, UT 84110-1315. Submissions on paper are discouraged.

As we've put together this issue, we've thought a lot about what the content might say about literary art and Mormon culture. Here are a few thoughts from those months-long conversations.

*Literature isn't a genre.* This theme comes up often in our chats with author friends; one muses, "I've written children's books, romance books, mystery books—someday I want to write a literary book." All those buckets, and literature is just one more bucket. Except literature isn't a bucket. Literature is art, an evanescence in those rare stories that transcend their genre.

*Literary art usually occurs at the boundaries of life.* Which is to say, (1) art is a powerful tool for exploring the paradoxes and dilemmas, the joys and sorrows of human existence; (2) while art ought to entertain, it doesn't merely entertain—it engages and transports the soul; however, (3) just because you're visiting boundaries or feeling entertained, doesn't mean you're looking at art.

So what does the content of this journal say about literary art and Mormon culture? We don't quite know. But it feels right. These are good voices here. They resonate, they are lyrical—the authors seem to respect the stories for which they are stewards. Quiet and compassionate and tempered by that unique perspective with which LDS Christian theology informs their art.

—Scott Hatch and Valerie Holladay

## Light of the New Day

DARIN COZZENS

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They were kneeling at their chairs, on kitchen linoleum worn especially thin in the region of each kneecap. Arranged on the table top, eye-level between them, were two bowls, two spoons, two glasses, a plate of unbuttered toast and three boiled eggs, pitcher of milk, jar of jam, and a seldom replenished sugar bowl. In the center of the table, resting on a folded dish towel, was the steaming pot, whose contents he never let himself know until *after* the prayer.

*We bow before thee, Heavenly Father, thankful again for the light of the new day.*

In her seventy-three years' worth of new days, certainly as long as he could remember, there had been no variation in the opening line. Even now, in mid-December, a full three hours prematurely, Edrus Penroy praised the sunrise in prayer. Even early in her widowhood, amid all the dark worries about the farm's fate, she had begun her prayer by invoking the light of a new day.

Nor did its staples vary. The first category of things to pray about was food. Whatever was in the pot, oatmeal or wheat mush or rice flavored with cinnamon, augmented by whatever was on the chipped plate, was blessed to nourish and strengthen them. Then, after the transition to the hungry and needy, the staples poured forth: grateful for health and strength, mindful of sins and shortcomings, in need of wisdom and guidance. The list was long. She prayed for the sick and afflicted. She prayed for missionaries and soldiers. She prayed for the leaders of nations. She prayed for a troubled world. Finally, hunched for warmth in her lemon-colored housecoat, she prayed for loved ones—for protection and safety on his two sisters, much older than he and settled in

places far distant from the farm, and on their good husbands, and on her eleven grandchildren.

The only variation in her prayers lay in the particulars associated with each staple. And these were dictated by the events of the season—military invasions, depressed crop prices, births, deaths, weddings. Ten years ago, for example, when his father died, she included themselves for a month or two among those who needed comfort in their mourning. And just in the last few weeks, her prayer had asked blessings on the forthcoming spring weddings of three of the younger tier of grandchildren, most recently the one named Myron.

He had heard every syllable a million times. But on this morning in December, just as he was ready to say amen and get to his breakfast, she paused, then uttered syllables new to both of them:

*And please bless Hewell . . .*

Only twice in his life had the condition of Edrus Penroy's only son prompted more than a brief particular. At age seven, he almost died from fever and croup. Then, at thirteen, forgetting his dad's caution, he climbed off the tractor without stopping the PTO and banged his shin against the baler's spinning driveshaft, would have been pulled in and mangled if the leg of his jeans hadn't shredded in the first fraction of a second and torn away clean from leg and boot both. "Thank heavens for worn-out britches," Edrus Penroy had said.

But on this morning in December, with no sickness or accident in recent memory, she went on at such length, in such a peculiar, pleading tone, as to make him a staple all his own. Please bless Hewell and comfort Hewell and guide Hewell. In what way? To what end? Thanks to a sustained vagueness, calculated or otherwise, he could not know until almost the last sentence:

*Inasmuch as Myron has found a helpmeet, in like manner, please remember Hewell.*

Despite the marriages of four or five other grandchildren in the last few years, it was the announcement of Myron's that finally called attention to Hewell's singleness. This was the Myron who left college a month into his first semester to live in the mountains until snowfall, the hunter who ate deer liver raw, the boy who hated suits and ties and crowds and,



for those reasons, didn't leave on his mission to Fiji until he was nearly twenty-four—and then only with considerable coaxing. And this was the returned missionary who never had spoken ten words to a girl, much less dated one. A good boy, but always a little strange, a source of concern for his parents and grandmother. It was going to take a special young lady, everyone agreed. But, not six months after flying out of a place called Lautoka, with a firm resolve to follow his mission president's counsel and get on with life, he found her. Sue the rescuer. Sue the beloved. And now look at him—engaged and squared away, studying accounting or business or whatever a forward-looking Mormon boy studies, clerking part-time in a department store, serving as Scoutmaster in his church ward, eating his meat cooked. Sue the miracle worker. And *where* did he find her? Nowhere farther than a Young Adult dance.

Even veiled in prayer, Edrus Penroy's logic was easy to figure: first, if Myron could find a wife, anybody could; and second, if his method worked for one hard case, surely it would work for another.

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By the light of a new day in late May, Hewell found himself kneeling but, with last night's wallflowering on his mind, only half attentive as she ran through the day's particulars: bombing in some European country, a beef market that had found yet another bottom, a dead aunt on his father's side, the birth of Myron and Sue's first child, one year to the day after their marriage in the Idaho Falls Temple.

Inevitably Edrus Penroy approached her new—and, by now, well-honed—staple. But, on this morning, this staple included a new particular, if you could call it that.

*And please direct Hewell, please bless his... efforts.*

They both knew what she meant by the word. As on mornings in his long-ago childhood, Hewell fidgeted—from hunger, from discomfort in his knees, at the memory of a dance he shouldn't have attended in the first place, at her habit of making God the go-between in this conversation.

At the conclusion of the prayer, after some wordless scooting and shifting, the old chrome-legged kitchen chairs supported the one oth-

er posture they existed to support, and a quick peek in the steaming pot solved the morning mystery. Wheat mush. He had hoped for rice with cinnamon.

Hewell's mother refastened the safety pin where the lemon housecoat had been missing a top button for the better part of a decade. Without looking at him, she unscrewed the seal-band on the mason jar of choke-cherry jam, then laid both band and lid, upside-down, beside the sugar bowl.

"Have some jam, Hewell."

"No thanks."

Edrus Penroy nudged the jar toward him. "There's nothing wrong with this jam," she said. "It'd be good on that toast."

"Yes, ma'am," he said, shelling the first of his allotted two eggs. "But I'll just dip it in my mush."

"You say that every morning."

"Because that's what I *do* every morning."

"Suit yourself."

She took up a spoon, very deliberately lowered it through the jar's mouth, and gave it a slow twist. Yet for all that, the amount of jam she dabbed on her slice of toast wouldn't have covered a soup cracker. Still, the reason the jar had lasted since January went beyond frugality. In her kitchen, whatever quantity of sugar a recipe called for was automatically halved.

"Just remember," she said, with a tinge of ominousness, "I've got two dozen jars of this stuff in the cellar."

Using her spoon as a trowel, his mother began spreading the dab of jam toward the bread's edge. Still without looking at him directly, she spoke of the day's work, of the bean planting and harrowing awaiting him.

"Soon as I get myself dressed," said Edrus Penroy, "I'm going to hoe in the garden till Co-Op opens. And then I'll go get you more seed."

Given the "efforts" she had asked God to bless, there was more on her mind than jam and bean seed. Hewell shelled his second egg, sugared his mush sparingly, and awaited the morning's real question.

"So," she asked finally, obliquely, spreading and spreading until the

chokecherry jam was more color than flavor, "how was the dance?"

Neither the shrug nor the labored shoveling in of mush put her off.

"You were back fairly early."

"Eleven o'clock don't feel so early," he said around a mouthful, "when there's thirty acres of beans waiting to be planted the next morning."

"Did you have a good time?"

"A dance is a dance, Mom."

"I bet you didn't even ask anybody," she said. "Knowing you, you probably spent all your time at the food table."

She was right. Twelve summers holding a cup and little paper plate or napkin. Twelve summers' worth of chips and dip, brownies and chocolate chip cookies, barrels of punch. What would she do with broccoli and cauliflower *raw* on a serving platter? Or real cheese and something besides bargain bin soda crackers? Or root beer floats? Or *buttered* popcorn?

She chewed her toast inscrutably, said, "Did you at least *talk* to anybody?"

"Old Newton never showed up. But I did see Gary and that cousin of his—Lon, I think his name is. They're building guard rail over by Gillette, came clear over the mountain just for a dance." He glanced at his mother, said, "That's desperation for you."

"I meant," she said, "did you talk to anybody in a dress?"

"I know what you meant," Hewell said. "And I think you probably know the answer."

Now she looked at him, said, "I might have guessed." She tightened the lid back on the jar of chokecherry jam, would have used a pipe wrench had one been close at hand. "You know, Hewell, the Lord helps those who help themselves."

"The Lord isn't the one you gotta ask to dance, Mom."

Her hands fell away from the jar as if they had been slapped. "Well, what a thing to say."

For several moments, the only sound in the room came from his own eating—the spoon in his bowl and the crunch of toast. Yet by the time he dared to look directly across the table, her face showed more grief than anger.

"I'm sorry, Mom—"

"All I know," she said, her eyes welling with tears, "is that, in this life, you have *got* to keep trying. Sometimes trying is all you *can* do." While her wheat mush congealed, she studied him morosely. "Do you have any idea," she asked, "how you come to be here?"

He knew the story.

"Even when the doctor said there wasn't a one-in-a-million chance I'd ever conceive again, your daddy and I *refused* to quit. Twenty years after we got your sister! Do you know how long twenty years is, wanting something every night and day of it—neither one of us getting any younger? But we weren't just praying. We were doing our part; we were trying."

In their life together, she had, more than once, ventured into such disclosure—describing, for instance, the history behind his father's hernia operation or her own eventual hysterectomy. But on this morning Hewell was not so much discomfited by her words as he was moved. Resting his forearms on the old eating table, he leaned toward her, said, "I *am* trying."

She snorted. "That's what you call staying home from their outings and giving plumb up on Sunday night firesides? Like a doggone hermit? Looks to me like you're down to dances as your last hope—at your own doing."

"Mom, listen," he said. "Listen to me. Girls young as the ones at these things ain't interested in me."

"Self-pity won't help you none."

"Is it self-pity to tell the truth?"

"You just haven't found the right one."

"Mom, it's ten years of this, and I haven't found *anybody*. Not since Gwen."

Abruptly she looked down at her bowl. "I don't really think you had anybody found then," she said.

"Suit yourself, Mom."

"You can't expect it overnight," she declared. "I never have. And you still got plenty of good years to look."

With one last morsel of toast, he wiped his bowl clean. "And where else would you suggest I do all this looking?"

"I didn't say anything about where else," she said. "There's no need for where else—not for a good boy like you, never married, clean in your

habits. Not if you'll get off your self-pity and do some asking. There's going to have to be some of that before there'll ever be any courting. That's the way of things, in case you didn't know." She sighed and resolutely patted the tabletop with both hands. Then she scooted her chair back, stood, began stacking their breakfast dishes—all while looking at him with what could only be called pity.

"It's plenty early in the summer," she said, finally turning toward the sink. "There'll be lots more dances."

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Midmorning of a day in June, after moving irrigation water on the barley and corn, Hewell rode the unpadded dish seat of the old McCormick, monitoring the cultivator assembly bolted to either side of the tractor's front end, keeping each of six rows of fragile new pintos centered between a pair of close-set sweeps. Get the weeds and not the beans, she would say at the slightest evidence of "cultivator's blight."

Already the day was hot, and riding a creeping tractor was tedious, soporific work—leaning first to one side of the steering wheel, then the other, vigilant for a snagged rock or alfalfa root bulldozing the beans. Just yawning or daydreaming, you could take out ten or twenty yards' worth. Keep your eyes open, Hewell. Down the field, then up. Sixty, maybe seventy, rods each way, at a crawl.

It was a long time till noon and the big meal of the day. Boiled potatoes, scrambled eggs, Swiss chard stewed until, on the plate, it was little more than a green puddle with stems. Maybe macaroni plain—she didn't believe in melted cheese—maybe beans or peas, *maybe*, if he was lucky, a pan-fried hamburger patty or a pork chop. No ketchup. No apple sauce. No horseradish. Just the flesh of the good beast, cooked like a slab of leather. And let the rest of the world waste their pennies on pop or lemonade. Tap water was good enough for Edrus Penroy. She had never forgotten being newly married during the early years of the Depression. No matter how many meals she had to build around eggs and boiled edibles from field and garden, she was always vehemently grateful to have *something* on the table. To her, even bitter jam was a blessing.

As was refuge from the elements—beneath a roof in dire need of reshingling. And a bed to sleep in—though how she ever had managed to fit a husband on a mattress barely double-cot wide, and how that mattress had accommodated all that trying, was an abiding mystery to Hewell. And wherewith to clothe herself. Home-sewn pants with elastic waistbands (two pairs of polyester, one of light denim), two Sunday dresses (summer and winter), of course the flannel housecoat faded to a dull lemon color, and essential footwear: a pair of rubber snow packs for barn and field boots, white canvas tennis shoes for everyday comings and goings, and lace-up black oxfords for church, for funerals and weddings.

Coming at last to the drain ditch at the end of the field, Hewell clutched, put the tractor in neutral, and hopped off to stretch, jog in place, revive himself for the long run back upfield. Looking at all the ground covered and all the ground left to him, he felt as if he were looking at his life. Forever one direction, an eternity the other. Too short and too long, too. He burped oatmeal and climbed back into the dished seat.

She prayed for health and was inordinately healthy. Skinny and wind-blown, a little arthritis, but healthy. No bowel malfunction, certainly. At a Young Adult fireside a long time ago, Hewell heard a food storage expert warn that an abrupt shift to whole wheat could actually prove dangerous to someone with an unconditioned digestive system. Compared with themes related to dating and romance and conducting your courtship on a spiritual plane—the usual fare at such gatherings—whole wheat didn't seem like much of a topic for a group of red-blooded singles.

*A fireside is a fireside, Mom.*

*What'd they talk about?*

*Surviving on cracked wheat.*

*I could've told you everything you need to know about that.*

In cobble, the click and chink of cultivator tools was a welcome sound. It meant the sweeps and shovels, though rattled loose on their standards every once in a while, were finding their way under and between and *through* the rocks. It was the quiet you had to worry about, when the big ones got stuck in the tools and dragged along for the ride.

Go to dances, do your part. That was her answer. Meanwhile, blink or yawn, and another summer was gone. There was no making her understand, this woman who had married four months before her seventeenth birthday and never knew the joy of even one Young Adult dance, let alone fifteen years' worth. A tank of gas and a long drive to a church house in Lovell or Greybull or Burlington or even as far away as Worland or Thermopolis—just to stand two or three hours at the periphery of a dimly lighted gymnasium, completely detached from the throb of music, studying the dancing couples as if through the glass of an aquarium. She had no way of appreciating the wariness, the banding together, the wide skirting if he happened to be standing between them and a group of new arrivals, guys fresh home from missions or on summer vacation from BYU. If he happened to be standing along their way to the refreshment table, they took another route, spoke to him only if they mistook him for a chaperone or a janitor waiting to sweep.

At nineteen, he had wanted to go on a mission. He could have had his share of dog and humidity stories. At some Sunday evening fireside he could have been the one reporting on his "experiences," fielding the questions of admiring young ladies. *Were the people receptive? Did they have four seasons, like we have?*

Despite what she said to everybody, despite one of her prayer's particulars in that era, she really didn't want him to go. Just wait, she kept saying, until fall, until after the beans are out. Or until after Christmas, when the cattle come in off the fields. Or until the planting's done. Just wait, Hewell. You're my youngest; it took me too long to get you. You have no idea how hard this is.

So he turned twenty, then twenty-one, and the boys his age started coming home. At twenty-two and twenty-three, he would have been old to begin a mission, but he could have gone. There was still a chance. But then, just about the time he was going to tell her—now or never—his dad collapsed right there in the muck of the milk barn, carrying a bucket of rolled oats, and the whole question was settled forever.

As on numberless other rounds up and down the field, the McCormick

came finally to the ditch. Hewell clutched, throttled down, then stared at his hands on the steering wheel. That girl last night had stared. He had just thrown his plate and napkin away in the big trash can beside the refreshment table, still had a mouthful when, not skirting or rerouting either, she walked straight toward him. They all looked young, but she was hardly beyond adolescence.

"Are you here for Heather?" she asked in her helpful, all-business, not-so-adolescent voice.

"Who?"

"You're Heather's dad, right?"

Never again. Even if his weathered face and balding head didn't betray him, the hands would. No missionary or college student fresh home had his hands wrapped around the handle of an irrigating shovel four or five hours a day, silt ground into the callus pad on each thumb and forefinger—impossible to scrub out, May through August.

*Self-pity won't help you none.*

"There's other kinds of missions, Hewell," said Edrus Penroy a week after the funeral. His dad died in late March, just before barley planting, with the spraying and cultivating and irrigating and cutting and baling and harvesting stretching ahead as far as the eye could see. "A mission isn't everything."

And he had listened to her.

"There'll be other girls," his mother had said. "This Gwen is not the only fish in the pond."

In his early twenties, when he should have been on a mission or due home from one, he went out a few times, thanks to the charity of some nice girls. They took pains, however, to let him know that charity was all they felt. But then, at a fireside a couple of summers later, during refreshments and mingling, a girl named Gwen came up to him—and she wasn't looking for anybody's father. After five years in a music room at Nyman R. Spafford Elementary School in Salt Lake City, she had heard, through relatives, of an opening at a school in Ralston, Wyoming. Better pay and a change of scenery. "Does that make sense?" she asked. She was the only girl he had taken out more than one time, the



one and only female he had brought to the house.

"A music teacher?" said Edrus Penroy, after waiting up for him that same night.

"What's wrong with that?"

"She's too old for you."

"What's a year or so?"

And too educated. And she's a city girl. And she's hunting marriage.

"You hold *that* against her? Tell me who at those firesides ain't hunting the same thing."

"There'll be other girls."

"Hey, stranger," Gwen said the very last time she called him, "I haven't heard from you for a while."

There would be other girls, his mother said.

And he had listened to her.

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"Hewell?" she asked, pushing the jar of crabapple jelly toward him. "You do *like* girls, don't you?"

41

Hay dust filled his ears and nostrils; leaves stuck to the sweat of his face and arms. But by four o'clock on an afternoon in mid-August, the knot-ers had tied a thousand knots—five hundred bales in a row—without a miss. Not bad for the old New Holland, bought the summer before his dad died, used even then.

"Because if you're that . . . way, Hewell, it can be cured, you know."

He had said *no thanks*—to the jelly—and she misconstrued. And once persuaded, she was a hard one to disabuse. He had assured her: he liked girls just fine; it was them that didn't seem to like him very much.

"Well, since you stopped going to the dances, I just got to wondering. It's hard to see you so lonely. Sometimes hormones need an injection or something like that."

It was bad enough half the world wondered—nieces and nephews at family get-togethers full of cheerful pity (*How's it going for you, Uncle*

*Hewell?*), all the people at church looking at him, week after week, year after year, wifeless on a back pew, asking themselves what else could possibly keep a red-blooded Mormon man single this long.

Pivoted halfway around in the tractor seat, one leg drawn up, swaying easy to the plunger rhythm of the flywheel, Hewell watched the unbroken flow of the cured windrow—up and off the slightly yellowed stubble and into the burnished steel mouth of the baler. At that point, the process was a racket of teeth and tongs and blades, so that whatever ended up in that mouth was swept without a handhold into the dark gullet of the plunger chamber.

He was halfway down one of the field's last windrows when he spotted the bull snake surfing the windrow. The spectacle always fascinated Hewell. A quick, darting slither left or right would carry him off the windrow, between the tires, and out of danger. But by some instinct beyond understanding, a snake surfing for its life couldn't see escape half a body length away, kept coming back to the windrow's center—exactly the position of greatest risk. As always, at the first flagging of an amazing stamina, one of the baler's pick-up teeth caught the tail end and flung the whole body upward; then a boost with another tooth, and inward it went, a writhing loop bounced toward plate steel on which scales would find no purchase, to be swept along with stems and leaves toward plunger knives that could shear a two-by-four without a shudder.

In the summers since his apprenticeship with their first baler, the ancient John Deere that came within a thread of tearing his leg off, Hewell had seen a hundred snakes baled—mostly water snakes and bull snakes, but sometimes rattlers. Sometimes he stopped the baler to go back and see. No matter how carefully he noted the spot, he always had to search four or five bales before he found the loop of scales and skin protruding between compressed leaves of hay—or, on the knife-cut side of the bale, the sheared segments. Often he was lucky to find even a nose or tip of a tail. Once in a while he didn't find anything at all, at least not until January, when the bale, deprived of its twines and broken in a trough, spooked the nearest two or three cows with the scent of something besides cured clover or brome.

Only once in a dozen times did a snake get as far as the pick-up teeth

and somehow escape. But on this day in August, with Edrus Penroy's hardest question so clear in Hewell's mind, this one did it. After the first flinging contact with the pick-up teeth, its tumbling body, like a boomerang of dog chain, found a current of gravity that drew it back down along the cresting windrow. Though the tips of several other teeth made just enough contact to buffet and disorient, every progress was now down and away from the dark chamber. And suddenly, finding the thatch of sun-cured alfalfa once more beneath its scales, the snake angled sharply from the line of the windrow, skimmed off into the stubble, and was gone.

A thousand sound knots in a row, and the knotter picked that moment, the moment of the snake's escape, the same moment the truck turned down their lane, to miss one. In consequence, the next bale issued untied from the machine's plunger chute and ruptured on the ground. And not at the far end of the field, either. Had her window been rolled down, the driver of the Ralston Light and Power truck probably could have heard Hewell's lamentation as he throttled down and climbed off the tractor. And had he looked up a little sooner from his fiddling with the knotter, he would have realized he had an audience, would have realized, *before* she went by, that the audience was not his eighty-one-year-old mother, who had gone to town after more twine and was due back anytime.

His lamentation gave way to something else when, on the return leg of the meter-reading circuit, the Ralston Light and Power truck slowed, then stopped just across the ditch from where he was still clearing clogged twine from the knotter fingers. The driver rolled her window down, smiled, and hollered something friendly.

Hewell tried to nod a nod worthy of so wonderful a greeting.

With the truck already inching forward, she smiled again, and waved, then was gone ahead of a plume of dust dancing merrily through heat waves.

At supper, chewing unbuttered corn on the cob with teeth unexamined by a dentist in the last fifteen years, Edrus Penroy said, "Did Ralston Power check the meter today? They usually come on the fifteenth."

"Yep," Hewell said, forking, at one time, a half dozen slices of un-

buttered, unbreaded, unflavored zucchini, "they sure did."

When the light bill came a week later, Hewell suggested that he pay it in person.

"A stamp's a whole lot cheaper than gas to their office," his mother said. They had prayed—Myron's wife, Sue, was due any day with her fourth baby—and were now eating breakfast. Thanks to fog and a steady rain, the light of the new day was not impressive. She said, "I don't see why you have to go clear to the far side of town just for that."

He reminded her that she often paid in person.

"I don't make a special trip of it."

Since the patter of the first drops shortly after midnight, he had lain awake thinking. But now, of all times, his reasoning couldn't *seem* calculated.

"It's raining, Mom."

"There's plenty to do right here at home," she said. "You can work in the shop."

Yes, he supposed she was right. He would soon need to start cutting beans, might as well mount the knives on the McCormick while he had a chance.

With great parental satisfaction, she troweled lime jelly on her toast. Hewell worked cautiously at the shell of a boiled egg.

"The knives!" he said suddenly. "I won't do much mounting without them. And they're at the blacksmith's. I took them to him a week ago, to get them hard-faced."

"Will he have them finished?" asked Edrus Penroy.

Hewell was more than sure he would. He had had all that time. And what better day to take care of such an errand? Then he could stay busy in the shop forever and ever.

He peeled the second egg. And—since Ralston Light and Power was just across the road from the blacksmith's shop...

"Now you're talking a little sense," she said. "I may teach you some smarts yet."

At the *Payments* counter of Ralston Light and Power, he asked only whether the change in their meter reader was permanent. But the lady clerk was gabby, and that one question was enough: the new meter

reader's name was Benita—Spanish for something like Bernice—just got the job, drove over from Cody every day—that's where she lived—was very religious, didn't party at all—but was the nicest girl, and a *hard* worker—had two or three kids but was divorced from the father—still had his name, Sievers, but hadn't ever remarried. And not because there was a single thing wrong with her.

42

Every month of her first winter as meter reader, on the day her route was to bring her down Road 15A, toward the electric meter of E. Penroy, he found reason to be in the proximity of the field next to the road. Any reason would do. In November, for instance, he carried a hammer and can of staples and walked the fence along the ditch bank—a fence so far gone that the chore was meaningless, like setting out to reshingle a house whose rafters had long since rotted.

"What in the world are you messing with that old fence for?" his mother asked during another supper. "It ought to be torn down."

"You're right," Hewell said, piling his bowl high with stewed cabbage. "I thought I could spruce it up a little, but it's got to go." He assured her he'd get to it in his spare time—which happened to present itself on the same day for each of the next three months. During this same period of his life, he added to his private prayers some particulars of his own:

*Please let the Ralston Light and Power truck break down somewhere nearby. Please let one of its tires go flat.*

In March, with every strand of rusted barbed wire rolled up, every stray staple combed from the undergrowth, every rotted post stump dug from winter-hardened sod—the ditchbank as clean as the dawn of creation—he resorted to burning dead grass in the field's drain ditch. The smoke obscured, but did not discourage, the smile and wave.

"What in the world are you burning down there for?"

In April he hunted all afternoon for wild asparagus among the charred stubble. When the Ralston Light and Power truck passed, he wanted to flag it down and give his findings to the driver. But he could not risk his mother's scrutiny. Not yet. Instead, he settled for the wave and the smile,

savored them like water in the desert. Instead, when he went in for supper, he emptied the half-full lard bucket on the kitchen counter.

"Nothing better than fresh asparagus," said Edrus Penroy, setting a pot of water to boil.

He wanted to tell the driver of the truck: You give me hope. I carry your phone number on a card in my wallet. I live thirty days at a time just for your smile and wave. And he wanted to tell his mother: I've met someone, and I'm going to try to see her on some sort of courting basis. Maybe that would convince her—his hormones were A-okay. If only he could explain, make her understand how, one afternoon a month, that ditchbank tilted toward the North Star and became a paradise in waiting.

But he could not afford to spoil this chance.

*She's Mexican, Hewell. You don't even know her. How many kids already and who's their daddy? And I don't suppose she's a Mormon.*

So what was left? Waving and waiting? And if so, waiting for *what*?

42 ½

Two more months passed. Another season changed. The electric meter kept turning. And in all that time the Ralston Light and Power truck never broke down and never had a flat.

So first thing in June, when the summer's first crop of hay came off the fields (about a week too early), Hewell made a stack where he had never made a stack before—just beyond their little plot of lawn. It crowded their parking space and looked out of place, but it also blocked any clear view between the house and the big light pole. This was the light pole whose cowed hundred-watt bulb, thirty feet up, provided something to look to on moonless nights. It was also the pole to which the electric meter was bolted.

"But why on earth right *there*?" asked Edrus Penroy after the first run of bales was placed as the stack's foundation. "Sixty years, and we've never put hay there. What were you thinking? I'll have hay dust coming in every time I open a window. And you know it don't take much to give me the cough. One of these days I won't be able to shake it. I'm an old woman, Hewell, but you work and worry me like I was a chore girl." She gave him a hard look. "I swear, I wish you'd said something first."

"Well, do you want me to move it?" he asked, with just the right blend of defensiveness and submission.

"No, I don't want you to move it," she said. "No need to compound the problem by making a wasted effort of it. But you promise me you'll feed this one first between now and next winter."

He promised. A promise that gave him six months at most, six months in which her arthritis and cough and low blood pressure weren't likely to get a lot better—or a lot worse, either.

When the Ralston Light and Power truck rolled into the yard on the fifteenth of June and pulled behind the new haystack, driver side closest to the pole, there was a lard bucket of fresh apricots perched on the meter. Standing behind the shop, between the chicken coop and vacant brooder house, in new pigweed already threading its way through pipe and angle-iron and sucker rod on his dad's scabbed-together metal rack, Hewell watched. She noticed the bucket first thing, the fruit heaped above the rim, and looked around several times before reaching for it. Then she sat for a long time—baffled? worried? scared?—looking down at the seat where she had set the bucket. Another long interval passed before she came back up with the clipboard and pen and read the meter, before he saw the amenable smile.

That night, and many nights thereafter, he imagined her hungry, fatherless children eating good food provided at his hand. He lay awake thinking of all the fruit and produce he could give her. And he thought of other things, too—the curve of her neck, the swell of her blouse. No, he didn't need any injections.

In July there was a lard bucket of tomatoes—and more. Atop a pair of hay bales stacked at the base of the light pole were short boards of various thickness, and atop those, a bucket of cucumbers and a full peck of green beans. Using his own truck window as a guide, he had fashioned the pedestal's height exactly. Thus she could reach the bucket and basket without even opening her door. In August—peaches, more tomatoes, new potatoes, and sweet corn. In September, after just one light frost to help the flavor—a big Hubbard squash and a basket of apples with a note tucked among the fruit. She set the basket on the floorboard of the passenger side, and then she was holding the note, written on the only piece

of colored paper to be found in Edrus Penroy's house. From his place behind the shop, among angle-iron and ripe pigweed, amid the drowsy afternoon cluck of chickens, he went over every syllable in his mind:

*I'm not trying to bother you or be weird. I just hope you like fruit and such.*

His one regret was the signature: *Yours truly, Hewell Penroy*. It sounded dumb enough even when it wasn't directed at a female. What did it mean, anyway? But then he saw the head tilt and concentration of writing, saw her reach her own folded slip of paper (from a Ralston Light and Power message pad) through the window and wedge it in the meter housing.

Long after the truck was gone, the boards and hay bales back in their regular places, all discoverable evidence of the moment cleared away, he stood behind the shop reading and rereading her words—*I love fresh fruit and vegetables. Thank you so much*—and the telephone number that, until this moment, had been just a number.

He was going to have to tell his mother. This sneaking was no good, this hoping she wouldn't detect his inattention and distraction, praying she wouldn't come around the haystack one afternoon to find him building his monthly altar of hope. Which made him wonder what he could put on that altar next month. It was fall, the nights were colder, the garden mostly down to dying stalks and vines. A few more squash maybe, and the pumpkins. Maybe a little sack of clean pintos. But that was it.

He was going to have to tell her.

*Her name's Benita, Mom. And if you don't like it, that's too bad.*

For three weeks he carried in his wallet the folded slip bearing the Ralston Light and Power logo, studied it two or three times daily. Then, against the urgency of the meter reader's next trip down their lane, he awoke one morning resolved to tell her at breakfast, steeled for what he thought was coming.

On that same morning, October twelfth, Edrus Penroy came from the stove hobbling, holding the handle of the steaming mush pot with both hands. For the first time in Hewell's memory she did not kneel to pray. "I'm a little footsore this morning," she said, lowering herself onto a chair, catching her breath at every movement of her lower leg. "I believe



the Lord will make allowance." And in her prayer, after giving thanks for the light of the new day, after petitioning the three thousandth time for Hewell to find happiness, she made a rare reference to a particular of her own physical well-being:

*Please bless my big toe, Heavenly Father. It's hurting me some.*

Perhaps out of humility or shame for a debility—or both—she was understating. As a matter of fact, the toe was swollen dark purple and oozing pus, and the bright line of fever already had reached her ankle.

"What's this?" he said.

"Oh, it's nothing," she said. "Have some jam, Hewell."

"Why didn't you say something?"

It was no cough or arthritis or low blood pressure that had bested her, but a toenail gone bad. At the first sign of trouble, she had numbed the whole foot in a bowl of ice cubes, then yanked the nail with a pair of pliers. But despite her experience with homemade operations of this kind, the usual week of salt water and vinegar soaks hadn't cured anything.

"Listen, Mom," he said, expecting a fight, "you'd better let me take you to see a doctor."

But she didn't fight; she only mumbled at the pain as he helped her to her room to dress, and again when he handed her a wet washcloth for her face and hairbrush for her head, as if any touch anywhere, even at the opposite end of her body, registered in the inflamed toe. She winced when, lifting her like a child, he slid her onto the truck seat, and all the way to town she was pale, her forehead clammy with perspiration. She wore a tube sock on her sore foot, but no shoe.

"You should have come in a lot sooner," the young doctor said. "Infection like this is bad in anybody, but for a lady your age—"

"My age is none of your business," said Edrus Penroy. "I was curing croup and earache before you or your mom and daddy, either one, were even born. I raised three kids with never a broken bone or an overnight in the hospital. And where was all you doctors' good advice when I was trying to get *him*?" The question, accompanied by her pointing to Hewell, meant little to a thirty-two-year-old doctor who was new in town. "None of it worked anyway," she said. "Hot, cold, special schedules—in the middle of the *day* even—we tried everything. What did the doctors

know? Nothing. It was a long prayer and a miracle got him here."

The doctor gave Hewell a look of utter bafflement.

"Ma'am," he said, "I'm just saying you've got a staph in a bad place, and it has a pretty good head start on me." He looked again at Hewell, this time with a grave expression.

"I may be stringy as an old hen, but I'll heal just fine, and I'll do it without a lot of overpriced pills and nonsense." Eyes bright, face flushed, she was babbling now. "Just a shot of penicillin's all I need. And while we're here, is there some kind of shot you can give my boy?"

## 43

On the fifteenth of October Edrus Penroy was in the hospital with Hewell at her bedside. After the surgery to drain her leg, she seemed addled, afraid, almost panicky.

"Don't go, Hewell," she muttered. "Don't leave me in this place."

To do the milking and feeding at home over the next ten days, he had to sneak away, early morning or after dark, and hurry back before the sleeping pills wore off. He had had no time for squash or pumpkins, hadn't even left a note. But one evening, late in the month, passing the light pole on his way to the milk barn, he found the card and flower—still fresh—and tire tracks that did not belong to the Ralston Light and Power truck.

*I heard about your mother, and I want you to know I'm praying for her.*

Several more weeks passed. The electric meter kept turning, the haystack between it and the house went down bale by bale, tier by tier, and, despite a second operation, Edrus Penroy did not recover. Hewell's note, tucked in the meter housing on a stormy afternoon in mid-November, was short:

*Thank you for the flower and card. I'm sorry I don't have anything for you. And I'm sorry I haven't called. My mother has been real sick.*

Sick as she was, her death, two days after her eighty-third birthday, took the doctor by surprise. He had urged against calling Hewell's sisters home, especially during the Thanksgiving holiday, had argued that their mother might linger for a long time, might even get better. Sitting at her bedside on that last night, Hewell knew differently.

"We got you here by a long prayer and miracle," his mother whispered in one of her last lucid moments. "After all that, I don't want you living out your life like a hermit."

"I won't," he said.

She could not hear him, was not really looking at him. "It's no good being alone in this world," she said, blinking long, then gazing into the dimmed light overhead, then blinking again, "no good at all. But one of us was going to *have* to be—that was the problem. And I didn't know if I could bear it." Tears flushed the rheum of age and pain from her eyes, then spilled into the furrows of a face soon to be relieved of all its wear and grief. "I'm so sorry, son," she said. "I am so very sorry."

And Hewell Penroy, single and alone in his middle age, was sorry, too.

In the first few days of December, his sisters arrived, went through their mother's belongings, cleaned the house from top to bottom.

"You really need some new linoleum in this kitchen," the oldest one said. "It's worn through all over the place. And look at that pattern. This is the twentieth century, Hewell."

"I don't see what you two were living on," the other sister said after a trip to the grocery store. "There wasn't one thing in the fridge."

Over the next day or two the old house filled with Edrus Penroy's grandchildren and great-grandchildren, gathered now from places far distant for the funeral of a woman they hardly knew. Hewell gave his bedroom to Myron and Sue and as many of their five children as would fit, and slept on a camp cot in front of the shop's coal stove.

"How goes it, Uncle Hewell?" he was asked at every meeting with a member of the next generation.

By the end of the week it was all over—the viewing, the funeral, the graveside service, the Relief Society lunch at church, the family dinner that night, the distributing of a frugal woman's belongings.

"She'd want you to have this," Hewell said, handing a full case of chokecherry jam to each sister.

"What will you do now?" one of them asked.

What he had always done—eat and sleep and work, one day after the other. That is what he would continue doing, the same schedule he had followed for twenty years, save for one thing. And that one thing

wasn't buying the farm, taking care of the legal papers to get it in his name—though, thanks to his sisters' approval, that would happen soon enough. He was thinking of something else.

On December fifteenth, despite his best efforts to sleep late, Hewell was up at five o'clock. First thing, he went to the switch in the utility room and flipped on the yard light—the first light of this new day, albeit artificial. One more feeding and the stack by the light pole would be gone, six months and a week from the day he had placed the first bales, seven years since the last Young Adult dance, ten since he had stopped attending firesides, twenty since his final resolve to get on a mission. Would she ever have known how long that was?

From the light switch in the utility room he went the refrigerator in the kitchen and pulled out a carton of eggs, a cake of cheese, a package of link sausage, and a square of butter. From the freezer, orange juice. From the bread box, a full loaf. From the cellar, potatoes. For the next forty minutes he peeled and grated, broke and beat, sliced and cooked. Out of long habit, he started to set the table with two of everything—plates, glasses, utensils—and suddenly caught himself. Yet after a moment's thought, he made no changes. With melted cheese dripping from an omelet, from atop a platter of hash browns, he knelt at his kitchen chair and gave thanks for food and shelter, health and strength, for the life of his mother, a person both flawed and decent—and for electricity.

At last, after a long night of darkness, the December sun cleared the horizon. Dishes washed, chores done, Hewell filled out his morning cleaning up the remnants of the haystack, chopping dead pigweed behind the shop and burning it in a big pile by the garden. Then, on a whim, he rummaged through the clutter in the brooder house and found a mostly empty bucket of red paint, another of green—frost-ruined and watery, but with pigment enough for his purpose. Over the shop's stove, he softened the bristles of a brush, then painted alternating rings up the light pole as high as he could reach.

At noon he went in the house, ate two pork chops—one with barbecue sauce, the other with horseradish—then set to work on a fudge recipe clipped from a very old magazine and kept (how many decades?)

at the bottom of his mother's cedar chest.

Somehow his sisters had missed it, tucked away in an envelope with some family photos and a ticket stub from a 1940 Gold and Green Ball.

The first ingredient Hewell pulled from a shelf of the utility room was sugar—a fifty-pound sack of it. He was careful to use the heaviest pan in the house—the mush pot—on the old stove's fickle burner, careful to stir in exactly the amounts the recipe called for, and a little more, careful to stir the hot candy patiently with a wooden spoon. By the time the chopped walnuts sank into the spoon's swirl, the pot's rich odor had filled his nostrils and the house and the whole world.

Later, with the fudge cooling in its pan, he showered, shaved, put on a new shirt and pair of jeans, combed such hair as was left to him, and waited the last hour he would ever wait for this moment. When the Ralston Light and Power truck finally turned down the lane, he put on his good coat, took the plate of fudge wrapped in bright foil, and stepped outside to meet it coming.

## Fish Hut

PAUL RAWLINS

Ramon, busboy at the downtown Fish Hut, has eyes like pearly black beads, full of the secrets of birds. The only English word Sheri has ever heard him speak is "boo," and this to the hostess at the counter up front, who smiles at him like an indulgent older sister. This Friday night is slow—the Fish Hut is more of a lunch spot, and tonight the weather is bad—and Ramon slouches outside the kitchen door in the small, rectangular dining room, wearing black, elbow-length scrub gloves. He is as close as the Fish Hut comes to excitement: the one-trick Hispanic busboy in rubber.

Sheri and Richard eat at the Fish Hut two Fridays a month. Ramon is always here, so he knows this and knows that tonight they are over an hour late because of the snow. Most of the time they have the fish and chips, Ramon knows this, too—and also, Sheri imagines, that she dates no one else. Maybe even knows that having Richard makes Sheri, who's thirty-six now, feels lucky because having him is at least having somebody, even if it's *somebody* with the small *s*. Some body, like it's two words.

Sheri can't remember if it's thirty-four or thirty-eight or forty. Her friend Katie told her once. There is supposed to be a point in your life, an age you reach, when you don't have to try to get married anymore. It's the year you can finally let your breath out, turn off your answering machine, buy the cottage in the boondocks where men are as rare as whales' eggs, and be content alone. It's probably not an official age—but it might be. Katie knows those sorts of things—birthstones, which year you give stainless and which is clocks.

Sheri watches Ramon fill their glasses, a boy really, barely twenty, his hands soft and swollen from the dishwater. She finds herself looking

into his face, willing him to read her mind. *Ramon.*

What is she supposed to think?

The Fish Hut is sea blue inside with false aquariums along the walls that have metal silhouettes of fish pasted against the glass, behind which are painted sea scenes of kelp and coral reefs and tropical oddities. A three-master crests the horizon on the far wall; behind it, a diver in an old metal helmet the shape of a globe, with bubbles trickling out of the top, lifts the lid on a chest of white pearls lying in a bed of red velvet, while a giant squid looms full of menace on the wall behind him, poised in perpetual attack. In the booth where Sheri and Richard always sit, a huge sea turtle glides across the illustrated back wall of the aquarium, caught in midstroke, breaking for the surface. A glossy statue of a young mermaid hovers opposite the hostess station, her hand outstretched to a leaping dolphin. As Sheri passes she always reaches out a hand to touch the young mermaid's great tangle of hair, thick and wild as sea foam, billowing behind her, stained the green cast of weathered copper.

The Fish Hut is a favorite place of theirs, and Richard actually seems excited—the clear glass plates shaped like fish with raised bone ridges and scalloped scales. As he uncovers the hollow of the eye, he speculates out loud on what type of fish might be rising out of the glass. The salad always comes with two rounds of cucumber and one bright cherry tomato. The dressing is Thousand Island. Richard is waiting now while Sheri scans down the menu. The waitress is waiting. Back in the kitchen, Ramon is waiting.

"What's your special tonight?" Sheri says.

"Mahimahi. It's \$13.95, comes with your salad and your vegetable and your roll."

"You going to try something different, hon?" Richard says. He's intrigued. Maybe a little bit surprised.

"What is mahimahi?" Sheri says.

"I think it's tuna," the waitress says.

"Dolphin," Richard corrects.

"That's right," the waitress says.

All Sheri can imagine is chopped pink meat in a squat, red can.

\* \* \*

Katie says its okay not to marry Richard if she doesn't want to. Katie was divorced for seven years and then met a man who takes her two boys on overnight trips with the Scouts.

Before she knew it was out Sheri had said, "I don't know if I want things to work out with Richard." Katie raised her eyebrows and then told Sheri she didn't have to marry him if she didn't want to—even if he was the last available man on earth, which he wasn't.

"What's wrong with him?" Sheri had said.

"Nothing that I know of," Katie said. She raised her eyebrows.

They were in a food court downtown, and Sheri arranged the Chinese food into three neat mounds on her plate: rice, kung pao chicken, beef and broccoli. Katie had dyed her hair red just two weeks before, and she'd lost ten pounds since she got married again. Katie said it was because her new husband shared the cooking, so she ate less junk food. Also, with him in the house, she could get up early in the morning and jog and not worry about her boys being there alone.

"You'll know," Katie said.

During the salad, Richard asks her about Christmas shopping. Her assignment is to help pick out something for his mother. Richard's father died when Richard was only a sophomore in high school, and now that Richard has some money, he's concerned about doing right by Mom, but all his gestures are too grand or ill conceived. Mrs. Davenport, Richard's mother, doesn't want to go on a Caribbean cruise, and she doesn't want to be set up in a condo or an apartment downtown. Sheri likes her. She's a practical woman, and Sheri knows a perfect gift would be something for her garden: maybe an ensemble, new gloves and a hat, shears, an assortment of bulbs, a little pad she can kneel on, some terra cotta pots, all packed in a little shiny green wheelbarrow. Or if he wants to be more extravagant, he can get her a new TV. Richard thinks he should give her a ring.

"You can give her a ring," Sheri says. "If it's something small and personal from you, she'll like it. Or a gold necklace, or some simple earrings. She'd wear those."



"I can't give my mother tools," Richard says.

"You're not, exactly," Sheri says. She gives up on the watery, translucent lettuce and slides her salad plate aside. The ring Richard wants to give his mother costs over \$3,000 and looks like something that would flash on and off if you plugged it in.

"If it's from both of us," Sheri says, "let's get her the gardening things or a new housecoat or something."

She really does like Richard's mother, who has told Sheri that her son does not take after her—which Sheri can see—but after his late father, whom Mrs. Davenport speaks of fondly.

Sheri met Richard on a blind date, the first date she had been on in a year and a half. He was okay, maybe a little paunchy, a little sloppy. But he wasn't weird; he didn't seem frightening or desperate. He had a job at a bank, drove a nice Honda. They went out to dinner and a show at a little family-owned theater on the west side that specialized in light comedies and the classic musicals—*Carousel*, *Oklahoma!* Sheri stuck her hand out at the end of the evening to shake because he seemed a bit awkward at bringing off a close.

He called again. Sheri went and took another look. His suit seemed to fit a little better, and he'd had his hair cut. Then they were going to work parties together and church parties together, his mother's house for holidays and her dad's for Sunday dinners and barbecues. Her father likes Richard, a man with a no-nonsense job, who is devoted to his daughter, and he's warned her, Richard won't wait around forever. Almost two years, and now the relationship goes on by itself, unwilling, unbroken. Like the way you drive to work every morning, buy identical bags of groceries week after week or the same brand of shortening that your mother used. Richard wants to get married in the spring, and after two years Sheri can't come up with anything that seems like a good reason not to.

"We'll keep looking," Richard says about the present; then he smiles up at the waitress while she serves the golden balls of battered fish.

Why *not* marry Richard? Sheri shaves off a corner of the special she ordered; it's sweet, and she finds she doesn't like it so well, misses the

familiar flavor of the flaky, deep-fried halibut. She can fill the WHY MARRY RICHARD list with at least a dozen reasons. The NOT tally is harder. Whenever she sits down to make that list, she feels someone watching over her shoulder, as though maybe God will see and call her ungrateful and take the chance away, like a mother might remove a dinner plate you'd turned your nose up at just to teach you a lesson.

MONEY. That's always on a MARRY list. Not that it's the first thing, but it's something she and Richard shouldn't have to worry about. He has a good CAREER, better than she has. She has a *job*—working for a credit card company, training people to take in-bound customer service calls. It isn't the sort of thing you plan on doing the way you plan to become a doctor or a teacher or a cop or someone who works in a bank, like Richard. It's just the job she's had for a long time now, since she stopped business college after her associate's. They like her at work, though. She's gotten raises and promotions. And she likes it, too, enjoys getting on the bus or in her car early (she has to be there by seven), driving out west to the office, which is in a white building with blue mirrored windows and prickly shrubs out front kept neatly trimmed by a crew of bare-chested boys who come each week or two during the summer. The sprinklers would be on when she got there on summer mornings, the water turning the sidewalk brown. Richard's building is a squat, pigeon-gray brick mausoleum downtown that you step into right off the sidewalk.

He has a HOUSE she doesn't mind, though she has thought that when they get married they might try to find another one. Maybe after a year or two, maybe in Bountiful or Holladay, one of the suburbs. Richard is NICE, meaning he isn't an angry or cruel person. He has an EDUCATION. She doesn't list CAR because she has never known somebody her age without one, and it isn't something that impresses her, though she appreciates that he keeps his tidy. They GET ALONG. Somewhere along the way you are supposed to grow up and see through romance and infatuation to find love that is based on respect and friendship and values shared in common, things that are going to last into old age. Like the couples in India who start out their arranged marriages as strangers, yet grow to discover love as they take

care of each other and do things to build a world around them: save money for a home, raise their children. That's how she and Richard might be.

"You work at it," Katie has told her. "You always have to work at it." Her boys were in the kitchen doing dishes, arguing about something, and Katie hollered for them to settle down. Where was B.J. tonight, Sheri wanted to know.

"He's on swing this week; he's not off till ten. That's one thing about Richard, he works those banker's hours." So she could put that on the list: **BANKER'S HOURS**.

Katie sat on the couch pulling a knee up to her chin to stretch, first one leg, then the other. "Are you afraid of sex or anything?"

Where is **SEX** on the list? It is on there, certainly; Richard seems eager enough. Sheri had turned toward Katie and shook her head. Katie put her feet on the floor and leaned forward.

"You just want to be in love," Katie said. "There's nothing wrong with that."

Is Richard in love? If she asked him, she knew he'd say, "Absolutely."

Richard can be **BORING** or Richard is **FAT** or Richard tends to **BRAG** a little when he talks—those things don't seem nice or fair. He isn't really **FAT**, anyway, just a little doughy in the face and around the middle. And is she so exciting or good looking? She has nice hands, but her hair's never been an asset, mousy and too fine—it helps that styles are short. She's never dated much, hasn't had a boyfriend since the one just after she graduated from college, the one who just seemed to hang around for four years until his job finally transferred him out of state. Katie's told her that every kettle has a lid, but population statistics belie that. There are more women than men in the world, so somewhere, somebody's going without. Her father's warned her about looking for nits to pick, but her own folks divorced after her father's medical retirement. Her mother remarried and moved to Illinois, but her dad has stayed, and it's him that Sheri feels closest to. They're a good pair. He's talkative, while she's more quiet. He looks out for her plumbing and her car, and she makes sure he doesn't overdo. He's been seeing somebody lately himself, she's sure, though he's being secretive about

it. She's noticed, though, extra dark socks in the laundry when she goes over to do hers, and more than one dress shirt a week.

Ramon comes to fill the glasses again. Will Ramon marry? Will he get a girl pregnant, or will he marry a woman for a green card, maybe? Richard grins up at him and says, "*Que pasa?*" Richard knows Spanish and asks Ramon the same questions when they come in each week: How's it going? How's business? From Richard's interrogations, Sheri has learned that Ramon comes from Mexico, near Mazatlán, but that's all. Ramon never answers more than a word or two. He's mute, the trial that comes with second sight, sharing the long aspect of birds. Besides, they are gringos.

She's been tempted to tell him *gracias*, like Richard does, for filling her glass, but she doesn't want to seem as if she is making fun. She believes that Ramon will be slippery to catch, but someone will do it. It will be one of two women: one who loves a bad boy and will let him be one, who will always allow him back because she cannot help but love him; or it will be one whom he cannot have, not easily and never wholly, and so she will become his prize and his passion, one he cannot help but love for longing.

Richard wants to know again what their plans are for Sunday; do they want to bring his mother down into the city to see the Christmas lights on Temple Square and the luminaries across the street that show scenes of Bethlehem drawn in pinpricks and the words *Peace* and *Joy* embroidered in languages from around the world?

"Do you want to do it on a Sunday, or on a Saturday when we can go out to eat or something?" she says. **RELIGION**. Sheri could put that on the list, too—the one with the plus sign on top. They agree on that. They will go to church together, won't shop on Sundays.

"That might be nicer," he agrees. "What about your dad?"

"He might have plans," Sheri says.

"Is he still seeing the mystery woman?" He looks up to ask the question, then cleans up the last of his fish, piling speckled tartar sauce on each bite with the edge of his knife.

"I think so. I know he's gone a lot lately when I call over there."

"I think that's great at his age. Maybe they'll want to have a double wedding." Richard winks, then folds his napkin beside his plate and excuses himself to go to the restroom.

Her father married her mother after seeing her dance. She had pretty white legs that were all he could think about for days afterward. When he was on the road more than he was at home, when they met like strangers after days of his being on the road, the pretty white legs and whatever else was good were enough until he left again. Then he couldn't travel anymore. They divorced, and his mother married another man and moved to Illinois. Sheri has never known what she is supposed to make of that.

The Fish Hut is on the bottom floor, wedged between a barber shop and a dentist's office. While Sheri waits for Richard to come back from the men's room, she looks around. There's nobody else in the place besides the hostess at the till, but if she leans over, out of the end of the booth, Sheri can see two boys and a girl loitering in the lobby outside. They keep their backs to the restaurant but sneak looks over their shoulders. Both boys wear big sweatshirts, and the girl has a black leather coat that hangs down below her bottom. They're not exactly boys—they're probably sixteen or seventeen years old—but they're boys to her.

When she leans over to look again, she almost lays her head into Ramon's lap. He has lifted his plastic apron off from around his neck so it hangs in half at his waist, and he is standing at the booth, beckoning her with his hand. Sheri looks up into his face, brown as toast, eyes that belong to a crow. "What?" she says. What she means is "What for? Why?" She knows what he wants. He's working his best smile, teeth perfect as petals, the color of milk. Up close, though, she can see that his skin is not flawless and clear. He has a fairy ring of tiny moles on his left cheek, tiny pinheads of black. He's motioning again with his hand. He wants her to come with him. He wants her to follow.

She clutches at her purse on the bench behind her and looks to the men's room door. Ramon has put a hand on her arm. She rears back out of reach and shakes her head.

He steps away, and in the smile he gives her now, she senses some

pity. She keeps her resolve, her hands and purse folded over her chest, and Ramon scoots across the restaurant floor and through the swinging door into the kitchen.

Richard has his hands on the table, guiding himself back into his seat, when one of the boys is at their table with a gun, shoving Richard in the shoulder when he isn't fast enough getting out his wallet. Sheri's purse, which she is still holding up in front of herself like a shield, he simply grabs. It's over that fast.

Richard is as shaken as she; his face is white, and he keeps tucking in his shirt with one hand while he tries to put a water glass into Sheri's hands with the other. He's talking to her, she knows that, asking her to take a drink of water, but she has no way to hold a glass. Her hands are there still, clasped tightly in front of her on the table, but she doesn't see them. There's a weight somewhere—it's Richard's own hand on top of hers, patting, shaking.

"Sheri?" he's saying. "Take a drink of water, Sheri. They're gone now. Sheri, take a little drink of water."

By time the police come, Richard has put his big suit coat around her shoulders. She clutches it closed and is looking at the door to the kitchen while Richard explains to a police officer in the lobby that she's upset right now, and it might be better if they wait a few minutes before they ask her for a statement. The police had pushed into the kitchen, their guns drawn, and come back out, snapping the straps down over their holsters and talking into the radio speakers clipped to their shoulders.

While the police talk to Richard and the hostess and each other out in the lobby, Sheri crosses the dining room and nudges through the swinging door. Aside from the row of large steel refrigerators, there is no place somebody might hide. She opens one of the silver doors, backs away from the puff of cold air, then peeks. Frosty bags of frozen white filets, five-gallon buckets along the bottom, icy brown bottles of beer on the metal grate shelves. She walks down the length of the kitchen, quiet as a white-tiled hall in a hospital now, and out the back door.

Outside, she's standing under a single bulb protected in a red metal cage like a catcher's mask. The broad white door behind her has FISH HUT stenciled across it, much like the generic black-and-white labels

on cans that say PEAS. The alley is an asphalt canyon between yellow brick walls. She follows tracks in the snow to where the alley ends at the sidewalk and picks up a white plastic apron that has been wadded up and tossed aside.

From the sidewalk she can see Capitol Hill, where the city rises from the shops and traffic of downtown into homes and steep, tree-lined streets with narrow plots of lawn, cars pulled into driveways, lights on over porches and in second-story windows—soft white light, and filmy yellow, pale blue—while cast up on the side of the building next to her is the reflection of the throbbing red light from out in front of the restaurant. There had been one set of fresh footprints in the alley, but the sidewalk is a mess of tracks, even on a stormy night like this.

Sheri stands with arms crossed tight across her chest, the winter air pricking her legs. He had come for her—he must have known what was about to happen, the boys in the hall; maybe he was even in on it—he had been coming to save her. What would Katie think? Sheri's shaking again, like she had been in the restaurant; not while it happened—it happened so quickly—but only after, once everyone was safe. She can feel her heart, beating big. She wonders where he's gone, which way, which street. He won't come back, he can't now, not after he's run away.

A police car pulls up on the street, and an officer in a black coat with a fleece collar steps over the curl of snow at the curb. He opens the back door and calls to her while she stands at the end of the alley, studying the mix of prints at the intersection with the sidewalk.

"Miss?" the policeman says again. "Why don't you climb in?"

But there's a message for her, written in the watery tracks pressed in the snow. She stands with Richard's jacket pulled snug around her, the plastic apron stuffed into a pocket, trying to read it right while the cop keeps calling. It won't be here in the spring. One way or another, spring will be too late.

## Deviations

LAURA MCCUNE-POPLIN

A man with dirt on his face and in his white hair was sleeping on a blanket in front of the heavy wooden doors carved with scenes from the Last Supper. The sister missionaries each placed ten francs into the cup by his head, moving slowly so as not to make any noise, then walked through the smaller set of doors on their left. It was their first time inside Cathédrale St. André. They would have come sooner, but they'd promised to wait until they had given away fifty copies of the Book of Mormon on the rue St. Catherine, using a visit to Bordeaux's biggest cathedral as a reward. It took them four months.

Once inside, Lucy inhaled the smell of incense and burning wax and waited for her eyes to adjust to the light dimmed by stained glass. Her companion, Soeur Stanley, walked along the nave, stopping to squint at windows and statues in the individual chapels before moving on. But Lucy stayed put, arms motionless at her side, allowing the cool air to fill her lungs and slow her heart. Of all things French, Lucy loved cathedrals most of all.

Crossing beneath a balcony of organ pipes, Lucy started up the left side of the cathedral, moving in the opposite direction of her companion. She walked slowly, her back straight despite the pull of her scriptures in her backpack. The echo of her clogs against stone reflected off the walls and climbed toward the webbed ceiling that made Lucy think of stone spiders.

She passed a chapel dedicated to St. Anne and the Immaculate Conception, where two older women wearing dark skirts and hose knelt in front of a picture so old the paint was cracked, mumbling audible but inarticulate prayers. Averting her eyes out of respect, Lucy stared



instead at the lighted candles one chapel farther and walked over to hold her hand above the tea lights, letting the heat of a dozen prayers warm her skin.

Some Mormons believed the Catholic Church was the great and abominable church, the whore of the earth that John describes in Revelation 17. But Lucy wasn't one of them. Taking her hand away from the candles, she closed her eyes and pressed her cheek still warm from the sun against a round pillar and imagined that the air she breathed was exhaled a thousand years before.

Having come almost full circle, Soeur Stanley passed Lucy, looking every direction but forward. Lucy didn't hear her. Unlike Lucy, who walked fast and deliberately, Soeur Stanley could walk without making a sound.

"Have you seen anyone I could ask?" Soeur Stanley whispered, her words expanding to fill the empty space above their heads. She held the straps of her backpack away from her body so the sweat collecting in her armpits could evaporate.

Without opening her eyes, Lucy shook her head.

Soeur Stanley loved cathedrals as much as Lucy, but for different reasons. The night Lucy transferred to Bordeaux, the soeurs went to bed with the windows open to let the air slide over their bodies and discussed what they wanted to accomplish in their remaining months. The conversation was Soeur Stanley's idea, so she went first.

Because she had only just met Soeur Stanley, Lucy expected her to talk about baptisms or discussions or entire books of scripture memorized. Instead her companion spread her arms wide and spoke to the ceiling in measured syllables of laughter and excitement. "I'm going to play a cathedral organ before I leave France." She waited at least a minute then asked, "What about you?"

"I don't know," Lucy said, which wasn't necessarily true, but she wanted more time to think about her answer. Soeur Stanley's honesty made Lucy want to be just as honest, and so she tried to think about what she wanted most. "I used to think that I wanted to convert people to the gospel," Lucy said, her head propped against the headboard so she

could look around the still unfamiliar room, which had turned different shades of grey. "Now I just want to help people find God. Even if they don't convert," she said, sliding beneath the duvet and turning on her side to go to sleep.

Soeur Stanley folded her hands on top of her stomach. "Yeah. I want that too."

Lucy reached the rounded point at the far end of the cathedral, the chapel behind the choir that Elder Tyler called the Holy of Holies. He believed that the oldest cathedrals were once used as temples, that anybody who knew anything about temple worship couldn't help but notice the similarities. Lucy had gone through the temple for the first time three weeks before her mission. Even though her mother and grandmother went with her to show her what to do, it took Lucy three days to process the experience and decide whether or not she wanted to go back. But once decided, she went as often as she could, almost every day, because she knew that it would be eighteen months before she got another chance. Unlike Spain, Switzerland, England, and Germany, France didn't have any temples.

Lucy tried looking for clues in the chapel that would prove Elder Tyler right, or wrong, but she didn't know what to look for. The Holy of Holies was the most sacred room in the temple. It was a place for communion between the prophet of God and the Lord. Not a place for Lucy.

Even though he was younger than Lucy by almost two years, Elder Tyler was smarter than anybody she had ever met, and this intimidated her if she let herself think about it too much. Thinking too much was one of her faults. She even thought about thinking too much, and making lists was one of her strategies to stop thinking. She believed that if she wrote something down, it would be redeemed from the purgatory of her mind. Sometimes Lucy liked the ideas she came up with, and these were the thoughts she recorded in her journals or the stacks of spiral notebooks she kept buying like lip balm because she hated to be caught without either one.

But other times Lucy's thoughts would haunt her until she forced

herself to think about something else, and even then she succeeded only half the time. Sometimes, thinking about Elder Tyler made Lucy sad, although she tried not to pay attention to those thoughts, not understanding where they came from or why, and not sure she wanted to.

Lucy's lower back was hurting from standing too long in one place. She shifted her weight to her left foot and loosened the straps on her backpack as she continued to look. The chapel's decorations were richer and more ornate than the decorations in other chapels, and the cathedral's only picture of Christ hung on the wall behind the marble altar covered in velvet and lace, making this room Christ's own and therefore the most sacred. But Lucy didn't notice these differences. She only noticed the sunlight falling through stained glass to dance on the altar in shapes of color because the trees outside the window were moving. And she felt it was a holy place.

Lucy's back was starting to hurt again. She continued walking, reaching beneath her backpack to massage the muscles. She decided to sit down. Sidestepping her way into a row of wooden chairs with straw seats, Lucy followed the lines of the pillars to the ceiling, which floated above her head creating so much light and space that she instinctively held her breath. Not paying attention to where she was going, she knocked the chair in front of her with her foot, and the wooden legs scraped against the floor like fingernails on a chalkboard amplified a thousand times. Embarrassed, she apologized out loud and sat down where she was. But now the chair in front of her was crooked, the only one in the sea of chairs surrounding her, so she fixed it, apologizing again to no one for the noise it made.

Sitting back in her chair, which creaked beneath her weight, and which would have been uncomfortable if she were not so tired, Lucy looked at the windows above her head and tried to read their meaning. Sometimes, depending on the cathedral, Lucy could identify the stories of Jesus's birth and ministry and death, or the Bible stories with easily identifiable components like lions or burning bushes or walls felled by trumpets that colored her skin blue and red and green when backlit by the sun. She would look at the windows and wonder who else—in the last seven or eight or five hundred years depending—

might have sat where she was sitting, and what were they wearing, and how and whom did they love, and why. Lucy loved how the windows shone like jewelry set inside stones blackened over time with the confessions of people unburdening themselves before God.

Crossing her ankles and folding her hands together in her lap, Lucy sat alone in the empty congregation and allowed herself to daydream.

Recently, Lucy's favorite daydream was one in which all the elders are sitting outside the Humanities building at BYU, and they see her walk by in a tank top and flip-flops and Levi's, because even Lucy could admit she looked good in Levi's, and they forget they knew her as a missionary, and they think she is beautiful. In her daydream it is always sunny and warm, and her hair is gathered haphazardly on top of her head, and she is wearing large, black sunglasses like Jackie O. And when one of the elders calls out to her (usually O'Neill, but it changes with every imagining), she stops walking and laughs and takes off her sunglasses and she sees on all their faces, but especially Elder Tyler's, amazement.

This kind of daydream Lucy would never confess to anybody. Not even to Soeur Stanley, who would probably understand, and who maybe had similar daydreams of her own. This was the kind of daydream that Lucy knew would never happen. Partly for big reasons—because even though she hoped, she never believed anyone would ever think her beautiful—and partly for less significant and more particular ones like how, even if all the elders one day ended up at BYU, the dress code forbade wearing tank tops. She only imagined herself in a tank top because one night, while they were putting homemade masks of honey and oatmeal on their faces, Soeur Stanley told Lucy she had elegant shoulders, like a model's or a dancer's.

Lost inside her thoughts, Lucy didn't notice her name being called until she felt a woman's hand lightly touch her upper arm. It took her another second to realize the woman had been calling her by her first name.

"Excusez-moi, Mademoiselle. Vous êtes bien Lucille?"

Eyes wide and mouth slightly open, Lucy nodded and quickly looked around for Soeur Stanley, whom she could not find. The woman bent

over as though she were speaking to an old lady or a lost child and smiled. When Lucy noticed the woman's habit (light blue, not black like in the movies) she smiled too, so wide the silver crown on her top left molar showed. So wide she almost started laughing. Because of her missionary name, *Soeur Adams*, Lucy had often been mistaken for a nun, but she had never actually seen one before.

"Éden said you might be interested in a tour of the Cathedral."

Lucy repeated the first name of her companion out loud, "Éden," the French pronunciation flowing past her tongue like water. And as though she heard Lucy say her name, *Soeur Stanley* responded with a nine-note chord loud and regal enough to resurrect the soul of the cathedral. When she finally released the keys, the sound hovered in the room like the remains of a good conversation. Neither Lucy nor the nun made any sound, allowing the silence to seduce them into wanting more.

After the last traces of the chord disappeared, *Soeur Stanley* began playing all seven verses of "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief." It was her carefully planned revenge on all the *catholique-non praticants* that slammed their doors on her message. She would play songs about Joseph Smith and the Restoration in their still apostate churches.

"She plays well," the nun said to Lucy.

Leading Lucy past the succession of side chapels, *Soeur Marie-Thérèse* recited the names of the local nobility immortalized by the marble statues tucked into alcoves and sepulchers like ghosts imprisoned beneath the weight of their own importance. Lucy listened to their stories and walked through their lifelike shadows dancing in candlelight, cast by the hopes of salvation for the less significant dead.

When Lucy passed the chapel of St. Anne for the second time she stopped because the women were no longer praying and because she had a question. She didn't understand why the Immaculate Conception referred to St. Anne and not Mary, when Mary was a virgin who gave birth to the Savior of the world.

*Soeur Marie-Thérèse* answered Lucy without looking at her, choosing instead to address her comments to the stone face of St. Anne,

whose head was inclined as though listening. "St. Anne gave birth to the Holy Vessel," she said, pausing to smile at the statue. "Her daughter was born without original sin."

Lucy looked at the statue again. She thought about all the Sunday School lessons and Christmas programs she had attended and couldn't remember a single mention of Jesus's grandmother. But He must have had one, and she must have loved Him. On Christmas Eves when Lucy was small and her family still lived in Los Angeles, they would drive to her grandparents' house to hear her grandfather read Luke 2. The house was so close to the train tracks the milk glasses in the cupboard above the kitchen sink would tremble like chimes whenever a train passed. Unable to keep her mind from wandering, Lucy would imagine scenes of Mary and the angel, Mary and the innkeeper, Mary and Joseph, Mary and the baby—obsessed with trying to understand how Mary might have felt. At these moments, surrounded by aunts and uncles and cousins listening to her grandfather's voice, Lucy would squint at the Christmas tree lights until they blurred together and realize she didn't feel anything at all, so complete was her inability to identify with the mother of God.

Staring into the marbled eyes of St. Anne veined with black, Lucy decided that if she were Catholic she would pray to St. Anne instead. The holy grandma. The one who had sinned.

Looking at St. Anne made Lucy think about her own grandma, the original Lucy, with the white curly hair she would set for hours in rollers, but never in public, and the Yves St. Laurent perfume she wore to church and to restaurants like Kenny Roger's Roasters or Chuck-A-Rama when she went out on Friday night dates with Lucy's grandpa. She thought about her grandma's tuna fish sandwiches and date-filled cookies and her linoleum kitchen so clean and warm and inviting that even Lucy's most distressing thoughts couldn't disturb the feeling of peace she felt in her grandmother's presence. Without warning, Lucy's throat constricted and her chest tightened with homesickness, and she brushed her hands down the front of her dress, as though homesickness were like breadcrumbs that could be wiped onto the floor and forgotten.

"Can you please talk to me about the chapelle at the end of the cathedral?" Lucy asked, changing the subject. She hoped the nun could explain the significance of the supposed Holy of Holies. Things even Elder Tyler wouldn't know.

"Of course," Soeur Marie-Thérèse said, smiling at Lucy's curiosity. As they made their way to the back of the cathedral, Lucy walked slightly behind and to the left of the nun because she did not feel her equal.

"Do you know the meaning of the word *Bethlehem*?" Soeur Marie-Thérèse asked as she climbed the steps separating the chapel from the rest of the cathedral. She spoke loudly to be heard above the organ. Soeur Stanley was playing notes so deep they resonated inside Lucy's ribcage.

"Am I allowed to come inside?" Lucy asked before following Soeur Marie-Thérèse into the chapel. The sun had shifted so that colored shadows no longer fell on the altar, but an orange glow remained in the room as though the walls were illuminated from within.

Soeur Marie-Thérèse raised her eyebrows. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm not Catholic."

"That doesn't mean you aren't welcome," she said, pointing at a carved relief high on the chapel wall of an ox and an ass eating from a trough of hay. "Do you know what *Bethlehem* means?" she asked a second time.

Lucy shook her head. She hadn't realized that Bethlehem meant anything at all. She thought it was just a name, like Lucy. But even her name had meaning: *Lucille* could signify both *light* and *devil* depending on which name dictionary she looked in.

Lucy was an oxymoron.

When she was in second grade and the boys in her class started chasing her at recess, calling her Lucifer and trying to pull her hair (which they called devil hair because it was red and curly), she went home and asked her mother about her name.

"Who am I named after?" she had asked, pulling on the white nursing pants hanging from the hook on the back of the bathroom door. She liked to watch her mother apply her make-up in the afternoons before she left to work nights at the hospital. Lucy thought her moth-

er was beautiful. She had straight blond hair that hung to her waist, which she twisted into a French knot and which looked to Lucy like liquid gold.

"You know the answer to that question," her mother said, opening a drawer to rummage. She pulled out an eyelash curler.

"I'm named for Satan?" Lucy asked.

"Don't be cute. And don't hang on my pants like that. You'll break the belt loop."

Letting go of her mother's pants, Lucy stood quietly with her hands behind her back, looking at the bathmat.

Noticing her daughter's reflection in the mirror from behind the scissor-like handles of the eyelash curler, Lucy's mother frowned and said, "We named you after my mother."

That night, Lucy asked her father if she could call Grandma.

"Does your name come from Lucifer?" she said into the phone as soon as she heard, "Hello." Lucy could recognize her grandmother's voice anywhere; it wavered slightly like an old recording, like Snow White's voice only deeper, and it made Lucy feel safe.

Instead of laughing, her grandmother paused for a second. "Nobody's ever asked me that question before," she said, "although I can see how that would make sense."

Lucy sighed into the receiver, which she held with both hands. "Does this mean we're named for all the bad things he did?"

Her grandmother hesitated before answering. "Lucifer was Son of the Morning before he became Satan, Lucy. I think we're named for who he could have been."

Soeur Marie-Thérèse moved closer to the wall she was describing. "Bethlehem means House of Bread," she said, waiting for Lucy to understand. When she didn't, Soeur Marie-Thérèse quoted John 6:35: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger." Lucy could feel connections forming loosely in her mind, like she was on the verge of remembering something she memorized once and forgot.

"What do the ox and the ass symbolize?" Lucy asked, becoming aware of the extent of her ignorance. She had never read the Bible all



the way through. How was it possible that she was a missionary and she hadn't read the Bible? Lucy shrugged her backpack off her shoulders, so it hung half-loose and stuck in the crook of her elbows. Her neck hurt from looking up, and her back still ached from not moving, but Lucy wished her private cathedral tour could go on for hours. She hoped Soeur Stanley would keep playing, her music flying through the cathedral as though she possessed a thousand fingers.

Soeur Marie-Thérèse placed her hand on the back of a wooden chair like an older person would a cane. Because Soeur Marie-Thérèse's face was smooth and her hair hidden beneath the blue fabric of her hood, Lucy assumed her to be young, or ageless, but there were liver spots on her hands the size and color of *centimes*. Lucy tried to imagine what it would be like to be a missionary for the rest of her life, and instead of feeling honored or holy, she felt scared, and slightly sick. This made Lucy feel like she had failed as a missionary.

"Traditionally, the ox represents the Gentile nation and the ass is stubborn Judah, who won't recognize Christ as the Messiah. But here," Soeur Marie-Thérèse pointed again at the carving. "Here we see Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled: the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib. Every knee shall bow before the Lord and know that He is God."

Soeur Marie-Thérèse inhaled slowly and placed a hand on her stomach, looking old and tired. She smiled at Lucy as though weary, and Lucy smiled back equally weary, allowing Soeur Stanley's music to fill the space her silence left empty.

The music stopped.

"I will go and tell Éden where she can find you," Soeur Marie-Thérèse said, becoming ageless once more.

Taking off her backpack, Lucy sat sideways on one of the aisle chairs and looked at the painting of Christ that hung on the back wall. His arms were open, the wounds in His hands visible as red dots on very pale skin. Lucy tried to look Jesus in the eyes and realized the painter must have purposefully painted His gaze slightly off, as though He were looking at somebody in a chair two rows closer and three seats to the right instead of straight ahead. Perhaps the painter didn't imagine him-

self worthy enough to be the center of Christ's attention, and so the Savior of the world stared elsewhere, allowing a person to look at the painting while maintaining anonymity. To observe without being observed. To worship without judgment or scrutiny.

Looking at Jesus's head encircled with light, Lucy wondered what He thought of his Catholic chapel and the Mormon missionary inside. Was He disappointed that she wouldn't dismiss the cathedral and its stories simply because they were not her own? She had been taught to distrust interpretations of doctrine that deviated from her own faith's teachings, but she did not consider the Catholic faith or those who practiced it as deviations.

Most of the time Lucy felt like she was the deviation.

Sighing, she looked down at her hands folded in her lap, wishing that for a minute she could shut off her mind and see the world in black and white like other missionaries did or at least professed to. But Lucy sat bathed in a room full of amber light, and she could not stop thinking.

Something moved in the corner of her eye, and Lucy turned to see her companion standing outside the chapel, looking up at Jesus.

"His skin is green," she said, then exhaled long and loud like she was singing. "I could die now and be happy."

"Was that Bach you were playing?" Lucy asked, picking up her backpack and following Soeur Stanley out the side door of the cathedral. The man on the blanket had changed positions in his sleep, so the soeurs had to step over him as they exited.

Soeur Stanley shook her head. "Buxtehude," she said, then threw back her head and laughed her happiest laugh. The one that sounded like bells the size of thimbles ringing.

Later, in L'Espace St. Jours where Lucy and Soeur Stanley were drinking *tisanes* with the elders, Lucy asked Elder Tyler if he thought he could be a missionary for the rest of his life. He swirled the chamomile debris that had sunk to the bottom of his cup.

"I would do it if I got to play a cathedral organ every day," Soeur Stanley said, getting up to find Elder Owens, who had finished his

*tisane* and was walking around the part of the café that sold housewares like ceramic fruit bowls from Spain or cast-iron butterfly garden spikes.

Lucy picked up her spoon and looked at the upside-down reflection of her face in miniature. "This is how I would look if you could see my insides," she said, turning the spoon to face Elder Tyler.

"Like me?"

Lucy laughed, wanting to say something about Freud. "That's not what I meant," she said instead. "I meant like me, but distorted."

Elder Tyler put down his cup and leaned back in his chair, stretching his feet under the table and placing his hands in his trouser pockets. "I think I could," he said, moving his chin upwards slightly, as though accepting a dare.

"Could what?"

"Serve a mission indefinitely."

Lucy crossed her arms and leaned forward, placing her elbows on the table. She looked at Elder Tyler like she didn't believe him. "In France?" she asked.

"Well, I wouldn't do it unless I felt like God wanted me to do it. And if God wanted me to do it, then how could I not?"

Lucy nodded. She agreed with Elder Tyler's logic. She usually did, but not always. Sometimes she felt like they could read each other's mind. Like the time they demonstrated how to play Taboo in *Cours d'Anglais* and Lucy flipped through nineteen cards, needing to say only one or two words each, before the hourglass emptied. It was her first time playing Taboo, so she did not think it extraordinary until she sat down next to Soeur Stanley, who three times opened her mouth to say something before changing her mind.

Lucy picked up her *tisane* to warm her hands because she suddenly felt cold and shivered even though it was muggy hot outside and there was no air conditioning in the store, just a ceiling fan that rotated above their heads humming softly and wobbling, the chain of metal beads clinking against the motor as it churned.

"I would have to be real sure that God wanted me to devote my entire life to missionary work before I'd do it," Lucy said. "I don't think

I've ever been that sure about anything."

"What about coming on a mission?" Elder Tyler asked.

"That's different."

"How is it different?"

"You mean besides the amount of time involved?" Lucy looked around the room and inhaled deeply, letting the air out slowly through pursed lips. She grabbed a piece of hair from her ponytail and twisted it around her index finger. "I don't know. Maybe it's not so different," she said, "but I'm not going to delude myself into thinking that my mission is some huge sacrifice."

"Are you calling me delusional?"

"No."

"Because if anyone's delusional," Elder Tyler began, then stopped. Outside the window, the streetlights turned on even though it was still daylight. Lucy waited for Elder Tyler to finish his thought, assuming he would say her name but hoping he wouldn't. Even though she knew he was joking and even though Lucy thought herself half-crazy half the time, she sincerely wondered if he discounted most of what she said as insignificant.

"Hey, guys, come check these out," Soeur Stanley yelled from the other side of the café. She was wearing a feather boa lampshade on her head. On her hands she wore oven mitts shaped like a frog and a lizard.

"If anyone is delusional, it's your companion," Elder Tyler said, smiling.

Lucy disagreed. "Soeur Stanley is divine." She reached into her backpack for her wallet and left fifteen francs on the silver ashtray in the center of the table. "I fully expected you to say that I was delusional."

Elder Tyler's face became serious. "I don't think you're delusional."

That night, after companion prayer but while they were still kneeling, Lucy asked Soeur Stanley why she had given Souer Marie-Thérèse their first names.

Soeur Stanley sat back on her heels to think a minute. The fan standing at the foot of their beds oscillated slowly, clicking like a sprinkler

head as it moved hot air around the room and blew random strands of Soeur Stanley's hair into her eyes and mouth. She tucked her hair behind her ears with both hands and said, "I guess it's because we're not real nuns and saying *soeur* felt weird, like we were making fun of them."

Leaning on her bed over her hands still clasped from praying, Lucy placed her cheek on top of the comforter and closed her eyes. "I would have done the same thing."

## Scattered

KATHERINE WOODBURY

The man and woman faced each other in the middle of Videoport. Lanky and dark, he looked like a shabby college student, his torn backpack spilling too many books onto the dusty linoleum. The woman was shorter, darker, with thick, wiry hair clipped short. Long ago, she had worn her hair long: great, oiled curls with massive combs, heavy enough to break the fragile neck. The man had wanted to often enough.

"You have to leave," the manager said for the fourth time.

Girl and boyfriend, he figured. This fight was, admittedly, more surreal than most.

"Naboth," the man shouted. "Naboth's vineyard."

"Traitor," the woman screamed. "Jehu was no king."

"Wrath of God!"

*Religious fanatics.* The manager sighed. "Really, you have to leave."

The man flung out a hand, knocked over the poster cut-out of *Star Trek's* Data.

"I'll call the police," the manager said.

The woman laughed and walked toward the anime section. The manager sighed. "Ex-girlfriend?"

The man hunched his shoulders. "Enemy."

"Yeah," the manager said. "Yeah. Women, huh. So, you leaving?"

Outside the video store, Jezebel lagged on the pavement. She knew Elijah would follow. He stalked her in markets, at street corners.

He stalked up the steps from the basement video store, and Jezebel headed toward the movie theater. Elijah overtook her near the fisherman's statue. She turned her head to catch his fragrance. He'd been in

this city longer than she, but still he exuded the smell of heavy spices and dry sand. He was the only familiar thing left.

"Harlot," he muttered.

She brushed him with her bare shoulder. She flaunted her flesh near Elijah—low-cut shirts with tight, low-riding pants. Absent him, she covered herself in flannel. She was cold all the time. It was summer here, and yet she was so cold.

"Strike me," she jeered, but he wouldn't. They'd both learned not to hit. Police would come, would accuse Elijah of "battering your wife," which delighted Jezebel, but bystanders didn't always agree.

"She started it," they would say.

She and Elijah resorted to cutting words instead.

"You scoff at God," Elijah said now.

"Your anger is feeble," she jeered and marched away. She willed him to follow, but of course, he didn't.

Elijah watched Jezebel stroll into the movie theater. In the long-dead days, she had worn a pin of twisted serpents in the coils of her hair. Elijah found himself looking for the pin, a flash of green against his eyes.

Ornamentation, harlotry, primping. Her hair now shocked him, cropped close, revealing the hollow of her neck. He did not remember her so young.

*I will kill her, God, if You give me leave.*

And still there was no instruction.

*I invoked famines. I raised the dead to life. I cursed kings and called on fire to consume Baal's children.*

Now he competed with a thousand self-styled prophets: protestors, doom-sayers, and salesmen. Uptown, he preached to Ahab in Ahab's plush offices, but Ahab only whined and rationalized and demanded easy solutions.

At least Jezebel listened. She scorned him, visited places of raucous entertainment, but at least she cared what he said.

In the theater, Jezebel slumped in her seat. She hadn't cared for that day's movie—foolish women complaining at their lack of men. She preferred

explosions and gunshots and several hundred deaths.

Elijah would be at the library by now, his sanctuary. He always ran to his library, his mountains, away from her. "Let him go," Ahab used to say. "Crazy bastard prophet." But even then she'd wanted Elijah's eyes on her.

*I was never weak like Ahab. I was Elijah's real enemy.*

She exited the theater into the night's chill and wrapped her arms against it. The slicing breeze made her feel old, like she'd never been when Jehu, the usurper, came for her.

She crossed through Wharf Lane. A group of men came out of a restaurant, and she skirted them, passing under the restaurant awnings through splashes of gold light from the windows.

One of the men gasped. She looked back—Elijah? He did that, made abrupt appearances at her shoulder, prophet-like, but these were only businessmen. They moved away from her, a pack of broad shoulders. She couldn't see the men in front, the ones discussing sports. Phrases reached her: "Great game." "Check out that half-time show." "Girls in thongs." Sniggers.

Ahab's type.

*He can't be here. Elijah would never pursue me if Ahab comes to the city.*

Elijah had always gravitated to Ahab, argued with Ahab, tried to save Ahab—from her.

If Ahab comes, Elijah will forget I exist.

The thought knotted her heart. She strode down the lane.

Safe amongst his investors, Ahab hid his face from Jezebel. Fear ulcerated his stomach.

*Jezebel, here?* She was pitiless, cruel, unrelenting. He had married that graceless girl and established her in his kingdom. He had even let her bring her priests and idols—out of kindness, that's what Elijah didn't understand, still refused to understand—and Jezebel had taken advantage.

She'd blamed Ahab for her priests' deaths, blamed him for letting Elijah live, for regretting Naboth's elimination: "You asked me to get you Naboth's vineyard. I arranged his death, so you would have a garden in which to stroll and meditate. Why should you weep?"



*She'll ruin me. She'll take my business.*

She had always been stronger than Ahab, more committed, more ruthless. He wasn't like her; he was a good man at heart.

He guffawed at the investors' jokes, exchanged witticisms, told them what they wanted to hear. Inwardly, he made his plans, marshaled the arguments that would sway Elijah to kill Jezebel. *With or without God's approval.*

Jezebel lived on the third floor above a travel agency. She shared the apartment with two college students. They didn't trust her. They didn't care for her gold-sheathed knife. They didn't like her borrowing their clothes or eating their food. She was as young as they, but she'd lived years longer. She was crueler. She had killed more; she was sure of that.

The roommates were packing when Jezebel entered through the back door. They looked up from cardboard boxes, their hands full of dishcloths and slotted spoons. Jezebel looked a question. The roommates exchanged a glance.

"We're moving," said the tall roommate. "The rent's gone up: a hundred more. We can't afford it."

Neither could Jezebel. She'd sold her jewelry when she arrived in the city. Like a commoner, she counted her money, hoarded it.

"Why did it go up?"

"Don't you know anything?" the plump roommate said and busied herself with a set of saucepans, avoiding Jezebel's gaze.

The tall roommate said, "Property tax doubled this year. All these new hotels and stuff. The fishermen will have to move up the coast. And the small business owners. Do you need help packing?"

The tall roommate would make a good slave; she was kind and trustworthy. The plump roommate was like the women who had served Jezebel toward the end: the ones who had tossed her to her death on Jehu's command. Show them a stronger fist, and their loyalties swerved. But Jezebel remembered the good slaves with fondness.

"We shouldn't have to leave," Jezebel said, and the tall roommate groaned sympathetically. The plump one shrugged. They continued packing.

In her room, Jezebel curled around her space heater. *Outside is colder.* Without this roof, she would be exposed: a refugee, a conquered person. Even Elijah would agree it was not what a queen should endure.

Her bones ached. Dogs had gnawed them when she died. Dogs had licked her blood. Elijah had prophesied the dogs when he prophesied Jehu's usurpation, but he hadn't stayed to see his prophecy's fulfillment. Years before Jezebel's death, a chariot of fire had whisked Elijah away from the old kingdom. So his followers claimed. She'd been happy to believe the lies, to have Elijah's troublesome presence removed.

Except his void had been filled by indifferent prophets. No one but Elijah cried condemnations upon her. No one else saw her at all.

Elijah slept near the observatory. He went there from the library, stopping to scrounge food from the Congress Street dumpsters. He slid into the tall grass around the shingled lighthouse, a tower for spotting ships. No longer in use, Elijah understood, but he appreciated the significance.

*Even this apathetic city needs watchtowers.*

From his bed, he could see the entire city: the sea to the east; the great Assyrian-like highway to the west. The city sprawled across a fat peninsula. In it, both his enemies wandered—the weak king and the idol-worshipping queen. He had not told either of them about the other. Ages past, they had schemed and killed and blasphemed together. *They must never meet.*

He watched the gold and silver lights. He slept. Hands shook him awake. Elijah grumbled and flailed, clutching at his books.

"Wake up, man. Wake up." Ahab peered into his face.

Elijah grimaced. "Get off."

"She's here," Ahab babbled. He knelt in the grass beside Elijah, his suit pants creased across his thighs. "Jezebel's here."

"Yes."

"You didn't tell me."

"She corrupted you before."

"Yes," Ahab said. "She murdered Naboth. She lies and—she'll destroy me, Elijah. She seduced me before with her gods and priests. You know it is true."

He crouched at Elijah's knees. Elijah sat on the backpack of books and rested his chin in his hand. He'd read the history of their people. He knew their fate. Ahab had been a bad king. Others had been worse. All had bargained with outside powers, listened to the blurry voices of diplomacy, trampled their standards. They'd embraced evil, sold their souls for easy living, forgotten their God.

Because of the Jezebels. Because of the wives with their dead idols and degenerate customs. Because the fire had consumed Baal's servants but not the woman who brought Baal into Elijah's homeland. Because she never paid for anything she stole.

And yet . . .

"What can she do to you here? She has no army, no family to exert pressure."

"She covets, schemes. You know what she's capable of. She'll rob me."

"I won't protect your wealth."

"But the people," Ahab said. "The people I help—she would cheat and slander them. Like she did Naboth. He was a good subject until Jezebel misused my authority."

Elijah groaned. *How long, O Lord? How long will Your people suffer?*

"I'll kill her," he said.

Jezebel dreamt of the sea of her childhood. Waves glittered; far away on the shore, a prophet met her eyes and winked. The closing eye became an open mouth. It howled, *Hear me. Hear me.*

Elijah's shouts woke her. He was in the apartment, and she was up and out the door of her room, hastening to meet the whirlwind of his displeasure.

She didn't forget her knife.

"I'm calling the police," the plump roommate shrieked while Jezebel raised her knife to the onslaught of Elijah's staff. She reeled with him in the small space between the kitchen and living room. The tall roommate screamed. Elijah's staff struck the ceiling, crashed against a doorjamb. Jezebel's knife scratched bloodless tears along the wall.

"Stop it. Stop it. Police, is this the police—?"

Jezebel sprang backward into the living room. Her enemy plunged

in pursuit. His staff wailed; the television set crashed to the ground. Jezebel slashed, and feathers billowed out of the couch cushions onto the thick carpet. Elijah hurled himself around the couch, trapping Jezebel between a plant and an overstuffed chair. She ran at him, snarling, knife held high.

The knife drew blood from his shoulder. He dropped his staff, which she had not anticipated, and clutched Jezebel in his arms. They drifted against the couch, dropped onto the feathers, and he was on top, covering her, and he was going to win, and she saw her death again, but not the dogs this time, not the dogs' teeth on her bones at least.

He breathed against her. His blood was on her face, and everywhere was the smell of him and blood mingled—spices and heat and sand. His knife lay against her breast, hot as summer bricks, as dead-cut grass. His hand wiped her eyes, smearing blood across her skin, and it was warm, his blood was warm; heat poured from him like the fire that consumed her priests, that engulfed his chariot. At least, this time, she would not die cold and alone.

His hand pressed her shoulder; he pushed himself upright; he was gone. Jezebel curled around his absence, shaking, retching, and she wasn't dead, not this time, not yet.

"Freak," the plump roommate screeched. "Freak."

Elijah heard sirens as he fled. They filled his brain with mocking cries. *Shameful. Wicked. A woman of idols and slaves and subterfuge. Shameful to cover her.*

The sirens faded. The pounding remained. *Weak. Weak. Run from her like you did before. You killed her priests and scurried to the mountains. A prophet of God should never cower, never hide. You always hide.*

He reached the observatory. Panting, he mounted the wooden steps beside the tower, pushed his weight against the outside door. It cracked, slamming inwards. He scrambled up the inside steps, up and around, to the trap door in the ceiling. A siren blared inside the tower. Sirens were everywhere, warning him that he was weak, that he was failing as he always failed—never strong enough.

He cowered on the roof. The siren's howl engulfed him.

O God, O God, I am useless here. I cannot kill my enemy; I cannot prevent the inevitable. She and Ahab will join against me—again against me. I cajole, and I threaten, and still I win nothing.

The siren ceased its shrill roaring. Silence rose like sweet breeze from the desert. And then, the Voice: *This is your home now. You chose the chariot of fire. You remember that day and that choice. The horses carried you here, and here you have new tasks.*

"What can I accomplish with her always present? With Ahab wanting protection? And Jezebel. Jezebel . . ."

*She is no longer your enemy. Ahab is no king in my eyes, as you well know.*

"Help me."

*You asked this before. You ran before. The answer never changes. Go down, Elijah. Go down.*

Hands grabbed Elijah and pulled him into the observatory.

Jezebel scowled at the police.

"You again," they said. "This is getting to be a habit, Jezebel."

"He attacked me."

"Your roommates—"

Jezebel sneered at the roommates who cowered behind a policeman.

"—are weak," Jezebel said.

"They say you knifed a strange guy with dark hair. Elijah?"

Jezebel shrugged. She forgot the policemen's names, but she knew their faces. The younger had been present the time she and Elijah fought in Whole Foods, the older when she attacked Elijah outside the library. The latter reminded her of a Phoenician sailor, grizzled and weary and wry. She did not mind his questions.

"He ran away," she said.

The younger policeman protested: "He thought you were going to kill him."

She shook her head. Elijah always ran to his god, his mountains. Always, he left her.

"You'll spend the night with us," the older policemen said.

She knew what that meant. They put her in their car, and she didn't re-

sist. She had no place anymore. She had no shelter from the cold wind.

The call for Ahab came from Elijah's lawyer. "He's been arrested. If he needs bail, could you . . .?"

"Of course."

Ahab loved helping Elijah. He stood over Elijah at the police station, shaking his head. *My turn now to preach and censure, my turn to find fault with a great man. Ah, Elijah, how the mighty are brought low.*

"You've gotten yourself into real trouble. Of course, I'll pay bail." Ahab puffed out his chest.

"I haven't been arrested yet," Elijah said.

He ignored Ahab, the tut-tuts, the dull portentousness. Ahab's voice mingled with the clanks and shouts and rush of the police station. Elijah sank into the chaos, closed his eyes.

*What now, O Lord? I am but a weak man who covets his enemy's wife: Jezebel, Ahab's helpmeet.*

"You should watch your temper," Ahab scolded. "You'll get into real trouble one day."

The station's outside doors opened. Officers Hudson and Carlisle entered, Jezebel between them, and Elijah felt himself smile. He kept his eyes on her, but she saw Ahab first.

Jezebel screamed. She recognized Ahab in this hard, white light. Not just the complacent, paunchy jowls but his hands: flaccid, condescending, waving aside reality. He was whining now to Elijah, turning Elijah against her like always.

She spat at Ahab—her once-husband, her so-called king—while the police held her, and Ahab cowered. He was playing both sides of the fence as he'd always done, trying to please Elijah's god and Baal. "Choose," she would say. "Choose." And he wouldn't choose, so she chose. He whined and pouted and sulked, badgering her for Naboth's vineyard until she made the hard choices. Then he ran back to Elijah, claiming he didn't mean it, he didn't want to be damned. She wanted to confront Elijah, but Ahab would never let her, only that one time with the priests of Baal after which Elijah had run, and, "Let him go," Ahab had said. "What does it matter?"

She screamed at him now as she had in the past: "Bastard. Hypocrite. Fool."

Elijah leaned his head against the wall and watched Jezebel rage. She had expletives to saturate a valley. She had wrath enough to cover a riverbed. The police held her and sighed, and Diane from dispatch said, "Your wife's right out straight tonight."

Not his wife. He'd corrected them many times, but Jezebel had let the lie stand, as she would, and now there was no point in arguing. Jezebel gasped and spat and Hudson, who held her right arm, said, "Now, now, be good."

"She's crazy," Ahab said.

"Not crazy enough," Diane said.

"No," said Elijah.

Jezebel turned at his voice. She had his blood on her, the mark of his hands on her skin.

"You," she said to him. "You make him weak. I was your adversary. Me."

"I know," Elijah said.

"And you never faced me. Except for Baal. Except for the prophecy. Ahab, you worried about."

"Not now," Elijah said.

Ahab frowned. He hated being left out of these discussions. They should consult him. They should ask his opinion.

He said, "Let's not fight. We can do great things together."

Jezebel stared. "What do you do?"

Ahab preened: "Real Estate."

He saw that Jezebel didn't understand and exhaled heavily. Neither Jezebel nor Elijah appreciated his talents, his charisma that brought people together.

Elijah said, "He manages land on the waterfront," and Jezebel stilled.

"You," she hissed at Ahab. "You're responsible. My rent went up—property tax. Your fault."

"How can you say that?" Ahab was offended. "Property taxes hurt me too."

"You dislodge me, me and the fishermen, for your grand buildings."

"The fishermen?" Elijah said.

Jezebel heard his indignation. She was, for once, glad to hear it.

"Investors," she said to the prophet who defended peasants and slaves. "He's brought in investors because the fishermen can't afford the higher taxes. He is making money from their displacement."

Ahab squirmed. This was not pleasant: both Elijah and his former wife angry with him—at the same time, over the same issue. She had always mocked his dignity, had never respected him, especially after Naboth, while his prophet—*his* prophet—condemned and belittled him. Now, Elijah and Jezebel stood shoulder to shoulder under the arid fluorescent lights and sneered at Ahab. It was hardly fair. *He* was the kind one, the tolerant one, the one who had taken in a shrewish girl with her fantastic idols and rude priests. Couldn't they see that?

He said, hands placating, "I'll give you a place to stay, Jezebel. I'll look after you."

"Look after me! You! Who never fought for anything? Who never protected my interests? I did it. Always, I did it. Bastard. Coward."

While Elijah watched and smiled.

"All right then," the policeman said. "That's enough now," and they took Jezebel away from Elijah.

Absent his heat, she suffered. She wrapped her arms around herself as she paced along the waterfront, past the ferry terminal and coffee houses, the glass-fronted hotels and the multi-level office buildings that blocked the view to the sea. The wind froze her, but she hated to be away from the bay, from that unending reach of sky to horizon.

She turned against the wind, heading toward Gilbert's Chowder House.

The police had settled things, as they always did, after long arguments with Elijah's lawyer. Elijah had gone away to his tower, leaving her in desolation.

Inside the diner, she paid for soup, huddled on the bench by the windows, and watched the summer rain stream down. A figure sloshed through the puddles on the sidewalk, a backpack looming high and lumpish on its shoulder. Jezebel's breath shortened. Elijah turned into the doorway, and she leaned back to watch him enter.

Elijah saw Jezebel from the door. Her hair was wet. Lines of water marked her cheeks and forehead. She shivered. He remembered their last fight, the chill of her skin beneath his hands. She was cold like the sea of this place; she was freezing. If he embraced her, shielded her, she might warm.

He dumped his bag beneath the bench.

"This merchant," Jezebel said, "is selling up—because of the taxes. You should do something."

Elijah felt himself smile. It was a long time since he had been similarly importuned, a thousand years and more since the widow of Zarephath pled with Elijah for her son's life: salvation from famine. That he could do. Jezebel's needs were less easily satisfied.

"There are meetings," he said. "There are people who protest."

Her mouth curved downwards. "The protestors are weak. They want peace without pain, prosperity without sacrifice."

"Yes."

She heard his regret, his endless compassion for the weaknesses of humanity. She hunched her shoulders, leaned on the table, chin cupping her hands.

He said, "You used to wear a pin in your hair," and the regret was still there, for her now, and she looked at him.

"I sold it," she said. "And the hair. Dispossessed," she said.

He touched the back of her neck. He loved her; he acknowledged that—it was a calm desire amongst quieting storms. Ahab no longer mattered. Jezebel was not his enemy. He could plan now as he had used to long ago. He could construct a future: a home for Jezebel, work for himself. He would bring order to their lives.

Elijah's heat rippled through Jezebel. She gathered it inside herself, watching him, considering. Prophets are not so easily manipulated as politicians.

"I want to kill Ahab," she said.

"He is no longer my concern."

"So says your god." She remembered to mock.

"So says my God."

"Meetings are not enough. You know how ruthless he can be."

Elijah laughed.

"And a liar, which I never was—not to you."

"No. But there are other ways—this city gives its citizens rights, forms of complaint."

"Legalities." She was scornful.

"We begin there," he said. "We begin without slaughter."

She caught the hand against her neck, held it to her lips.

"Promise," she said. "When the civilized attempts fail, promise you will call down fire from heaven. Promise me."

Her lips were chilled violets of entreaty. Her neck was straight and unbowed, her eyes unrelenting. She was a queen without a home or a nation.

He would get her all she asked. He would make her paths smooth.

"I promise," he said.



## Learning to Write

HENRY MILES

Put your surprise up front and see if there's anything left.  
Holding a surprise until the end does not a story make.

—Darrell Spencer

Peter Makuck, visiting professor of creative writing, moved his left hand down the margin of my essay, pointing his pen to his comments as he explained them. I had written "The Water of Life" for Danielle Beazer, my first creative writing teacher at BYU, and following her suggestions, I had revised that essay into "The Water of Life and Death." I thought it was done. I had revised it more than any other paper: four times. Peter turned to page ten. "The event and the detail make this scene powerful," he said referring to actions preceding my dad's suicide. The scene began:

Dad placed the rifle butt against the half-moon wheel well of his pickup to see if the muzzle would reach the tailgate; it did. He took up the rifle, put a cartridge in the chamber, pushed the bolt forward, and locked it. He peered between the garage doors at the sixty-foot driveway lined with yellow-leafed aspens on the ditch bank on the east and a thirty-foot pine tree near the house on the west.

Peter flipped back to page four. "This is a wonderful scene of your dad and the moose," he said. "Vivid."

Dad had never seen a moose where he hunted above the cattle ranches in Bone, Idaho. He moved the cross hairs from antlers to shoulders admiring the bull's majesty. Slowly the temptation grew until it was stronger than his fear of the law.

Peter moved to page two and said, "These details do what you want:

show your state of mind, instead of just tell it." He was referring to the moments after Mother had informed me of Dad's death; I had just hung up the phone.

I put my keys and my glasses on the bed and couldn't find them, found myself packing the wrong clothes and doing other things unconsciously. I caught myself and sat at the dining room table. Grabbing my head in both hands, I cried, "Daddy, why did you do it?" over and over until my emotions went numb.

Pointing to the middle of page six, Peter said, "Here's your best transition. See how smoothly it moves from irrigation to cancer?"

In 1980, our family had to begin dealing with a different water problem. Dad noticed blood in his urine; tests revealed cancer of the prostate gland.

We looked at page eight. "You can increase the immediacy of this sentence by cutting words," he said. He had crossed through some words with his pen.

Therapy would enable him to get insight into his behavior and ~~begin doing something~~ to change it instead of repeating the cycle of abuse and apology.

He turned to the first page again. "I think this part between parentheses could be better, more lyrical," Peter said. He pointed to the part where I'm comforting Mother on the telephone after she told me Dad had died.

We wept together (as this grim situation shocked itself into reality.)

Peter put the paper down and took off his glasses. "The rest of my comments are really picky. Your prose is as solid as your poetry. There's fine description in here." He pushed the pencil behind his left ear and into his brown hair with gray strands. "The problem," he said, putting his chin on his hands, "is the structure. The real drama begins near the end with the entrance of your father." Peter put his hands along the sides of the essay, looked far away, thought aloud: "Perhaps you could frame

the water material in flashbacks. Begin visiting with your mother or attempting to persuade her to leave your dad."

He looked down at the essay. "What if you started with your father and interrupted the narrative with memory footage: 'Toward the end, my father had trouble getting rid of his water. . . ' something like that." The bell rang and he pushed the paper toward me.

"Sounds interesting," I said. Four drafts and I was still at the beginning. "Thanks for the time and I'll also look at the students' comments again." We smiled, mine forced, and he followed me into the hall.

I parked my motorcycle in the garage, went into the kitchen, and laid my backpack on the island counter where we ate. "What did Dr. Makuck say?" Carol said, looking up from Pauline Mortenson's *Back before the World Turned Nasty*, a text for her creative writing class.

"It needs *beaucoup* work, and I won't feel like writing for four days." It took four days for my ego to heal in such situations. I'd measured it before. The comments brought a feeling of futility, but I knew I'd be back on the essay in four days. Feelings of futility demobilized me; it took all my skills and mental power to create the essay. Fixing its structure seemed impossible. I didn't have a concept of the task; I was groping in the space of hit and miss. But I'd groped before. In the morning I'd awake depressed and revising the essay in my mind. The next morning I'd wake less depressed, and the third morning the essay would be out of my mind. On the fourth day, the comments would not overwhelm me, and if pushed, I could begin revising again.

In two weeks I had revised the essay following Peter's suggestions. Carol read it closely, I did more revising, and the essay seemed ready for my thesis advisor's review. I gave him a copy and set an hour to see him the next week. The appointed time arrived, I went to John Bennion's office and found him on the phone. He motioned me to sit in a chair covered with books. John finished shortly, hung up the phone, and swiveled his chair toward me. He folded down a page of the essay and perused his scribbles on the margins. "The essay has a strong voice, and the narration of your father's suicide is compelling," he said.

John turned his chair toward his desk and sneezed and sneezed. Eyes

watering, he said, "Spring is here." He picked up my essay again. "This really caught my interest, but you need to think about how readers will feel as they take this trip with you. In an essay, you want to convey what you felt as closely as you can, so you must tell readers what you knew when you were undergoing the experience."

He held his hands parallel in front of him and moved his eyes from me to his moving hands. "Here's what happens now." He spread his palms apart as if he were telling a fish story. "I think you're taking me down 'memory I-15' on the way to your dad's funeral and, at the end of the trip, I learn of the suicide, just like that." He clapped his hands then knitted his fingers over his turquoise belt buckle and looked at his boots.

"That 230-mile trip is a whole different experience if we know beforehand, as you did, that your father had just shot himself." He raised his eyes but not his head, causing his eyebrows to arch. "See what I mean?" he said.

"I believe so. In writing that part, I know I didn't think about the feelings it would evoke in the reader."

"Think about it. I believe you'll agree. When you get the structure fixed, we'll get into the essay's details."

I zipped up my backpack and shouldered it as we both stood up. I opened the door and stepped out. John took two steps and leaned in the doorway, his hands in the pockets of his tan corduroys. "Call me at home if you need to," he said.

Peter Makuck took my essay from his briefcase, looked at it, and pulled out his billfold. He passed me a five dollar bill, "Thanks for the loan for Lee's flowers," he said. "I've owed you five for weeks. I wrote this note on your essay to remind me." He had penned "\$5.00 for *HLM*" at the top.

"What kind of cancer does Lee have?" I said.

"Ovarian. One of the worst."

"Didn't she have any warning?"

"Not really. Her clothes began feeling tight in her stomach," he said, pressing his hands on his shirt just above his belt. "For weeks she thought she was just gaining back the weight she lost last fall."

"What's next for her?" I said.

"Six months of chemo, and her chances are less than fifty-fifty. Some people can't face this; Lee can. She talked about the cancer; she's still doing her writing assignments. The flowers meant a lot to her. There's strong faith there," he said. "I admire her." His voice tightened and we turned to my essay.

Peter held the essay at arm's length and looked through his half glasses. "This is much better than the earlier version. An absolutely wrenching narrative." He pushed up the sleeves of his bulky brown sweater and shirt, so the flesh would keep his arms from sliding forward on the polished desk top. He leaned on his forearms and said, "This is supposed to be about your mother, but I think this essay is now about your father. Beginning with the phone call about your dad's death and adding details about him have tilted the focus."

*I'll never get this damn essay done*, I thought. Instead of writing the essay toward closure, I've written it into a new orbit. Peter turned the pages. "I think you should consider cutting some events about your mother."

"Could you give me an idea of what to cut?" I said.

He studied page one. "I'd cut this about her horse, Teddy," he said, turning the page. "I'd cut the straw stack fire and your Aunt Hazel's death—she got typhoid fever drinking from an irrigation ditch because her husband didn't get the well fixed—unbelievable," he said. "Cut things that don't relate to your dad or the family in some way. Write an essay about your mother, and put these events in it. They create her world; they're delightful and gripping."

"You would leave in the fight between Mother and Mrs. Cook over the water?" I said, tentatively, looking over his shoulder.

"Right," he said, turning his head up and smiling. "It adds context for your father's life. The event takes place where he lived after he was married and involves his wife, his children, and his next-door neighbor."

Peter looked at me. "Are you tired of revising? Writing doesn't get easier, but writers learn to expect to revise and revise. There's no formula. You rewrite until you get there."

\* \* \*

Winter semester was ending when I revised the essay once more and put it and other works into my portfolio for a final evaluation. Peter was getting ready to return to East Carolina University when I picked up the graded portfolio the first week of spring semester. A note on the first page said: "Henry, your patience and strenuous revisions throughout the semester have been most impressive to me, and a good example to other students." The essay, now titled "Mishearing," had only editing remarks in its margins. I wrote them into the essay and left it under John Bennion's door again, thinking the essay was surely finished now, or almost.

"This is much better," John said, pinching his mustache. "Beginning with the phone call from your neighbor Ernie sets up the emotional background for the trip." He sat curling one page and biting the front of his mustache. I expected what came next—"but." My professors always began with a litany of positives, excited me, made me feel I'd learned to write, and then the "but" fell like a third boot.

John swiveled ninety degrees and faced me. "I can't put my finger on exactly what's bothering me," he said. "Maybe it's organization." He put his hand in front of him and moved it in a straight line. "You're heading toward Blackfoot on I-15 in a car, and your essay is telling events of your dad's life in chronological order. Would your thoughts come like that?" He looked away from his fingers. "I don't know. But maybe your thoughts would go to the last time you saw your father." He put both hands in front of him and moved them toward each other. "I wonder if it wouldn't work better if you began with the last time you saw your dad and reversed the sequence of the narrative, at least for a few pages?"

I thought about writing in reverse time, putting events in the reverse order of their occurrence. I was reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and noted that it shattered backwards through time in places. I wished for her skills. I drafted two pages in reverse sequence. My sharpest memory during the last few visits home before Dad's death was my mother making me aware of her trials with this dying man.

Mother and I took the new Vanagon for a drive through the sand hills of her childhood near Firth, Idaho. She sobbed her frustration, thought



she might die before cancer killed Dad. His physical abuse had subsided; now he controlled her with language. He said Mother could not have friends over; they made him too nervous, and she couldn't talk to her friends on the phone either, that made him nervous too. And he said she could not play the piano. He lost his temper and cut her with his sharp tongue; afterward, he cried, apologized, blamed his nerves, and said he could not help himself. Dad was still a tyrant; he had only become less physical.

"Insist that Dad take therapy or leave him," I said. "Come live with us." He needed therapy to heal himself, to learn to vent his anger without abusing people. Maybe it would reduce his nervousness and relax his constricted urinary muscles.

"But it's not Daddy's fault," Mother said. "He had no childhood; his dad put him in the mountains with the sheep when he was only six years old. Spence used to beat him up for fun and he inherited a bad English temper."

I felt frustrated; I wished there had been shelters for battered woman fifty years before when Mother had the will to run away but reconciled and returned because she had no means to raise her sons. Anyway, that's what she said.

It makes a difference to know about Dad's childhood, my experiences with him, my LDS mission making me aware that beatings were not the norm, religion inducing tension between Dad and me, my job overseas permitting me to visit home only once each two years, the history of Dad's cancer, my work as a volunteer in a battered women's shelter. How could these events be scattered through the narrative in reverse chronological order in a comprehensible way? I couldn't devise a way to connect events coherently without massive repetition to explain the context of the events. My skills were inadequate to this challenge. I put the essay away.

It was mid-semester and I was taking my first class from Dr. Darrell Spencer. He had on Levis, a sport jacket, a black shirt, and a wide black tie with a silver chain running the length of it. The tie was twice as

wide as the current style, and Darrell wasn't President Eisenhower, who wore double-breasted suits in the 1950s because he wasn't style conscious. Darrell's lectures and books of short stories demonstrated his consciousness of styles: mainstream, avant-garde, subcultural. He was a voracious reader of stories of contemporary people, and he wrote about his contemporaries. He kept abreast of styles and behavior, so I pondered the meaning of his black shirt, when most people wore white, and his wide tie in a narrow-tie era.

Darrell stood up straight and the tie fell against his chest and stomach. The black edges of the tie dissolved into the black shirt and laced the space between his neck and belt with three large links of chain. I thought of Jacob Marley's ghost. Darrell leaned forward and the tie moved away from the shirt, the tie's outline reappeared, and the length of chain emerged from the shirt and re-formed in a tie.

Surely, Darrell's tie was to make a statement. Employing the post-modern analysis he had taught us, I could say he meant to call attention to the tie, to interrogate it, make observers aware that a tie was merely a convention, not natural neckwear. A tie had no essence. It took on meaning only within our system of dress. At BYU it meant he was complying with the dress code. The black shirt and out-of-style tie contrasted with current styles and suggested he was aware that dress standards are cultural artifacts, not writ from gold plates.

Darrell was wearing a tie, and he wasn't wearing a tie. When its edges were visible, he had on a tie; when they dissolved into the shirt, he was wearing a black shirt with a length of chain down the front. A ghostly design down the front of a shirt could serve as a tie if one wanted colors to contrast with the shirt, and one shape or width was as good as another. The tie was like a plot or theme or metaphor, merely a convention. He was playing with us, I thought. He was saying, "Come play the game. Read my tie." And I did.

We were seated in a circle discussing a student's short story. Darrell's turn to respond came and he said, "This story doesn't work now because it relies totally on the surprise ending for its effect. If you want to know whether you have a story or not," Darrell said, "put your surprise up front and see if there's anything left. Holding a surprise until

the end does not a story make." He brought his right hand down and karate chopped the upper edge of his left hand. Turning to the board, he chalked a line ascending upward from crisis to crisis to climax and descending into resolution to reinforce his reasoning. His tie moved in and out and dissolved and re-formed as he moved both hands.

Darrell's comment about putting the surprise up front moved my mind from his tie to my weary essay. I had saved its most compelling scene for the end. The suicide was mentioned in the opening paragraph, but it was not enacted until the end. What if the entire suicide story came at the beginning? I imagined that story to the front of the essay and tried to think out the effects while students argued with Darrell and with each other, and, unnoticed, a tie of chain links interrogated conventions of dress. The idea of moving the suicide to the front of my essay excited me. I would find out if I had a story.

In the evening, I looked out the window while the computer hummed on, jet like, and moaned twice to check its floppy drives. The sun was behind the mountains, but a canyon permitted the sun to burn a pink path across Utah Lake. I turned to the eleven-inch Samsung monitor, which lit up a rectangle of four lines and a menu across the top. I punched the edit mode and moved elements of the suicide to the beginning of the essay. The function I used, "cutting and pasting," left a nostalgic trace of the days when I used to cut fifty-page feasibility studies into sections, rearrange them, chop out the ubiquitous phrase "in terms of," revise transitions, connect the pieces together with scotch tape, and give the patchwork to my secretary to type another draft.

I hadn't seen the suicide all in one place before. It seemed better. I decided to revise the essay to match this change, but I didn't have time. I revised it the next semester, titled it "Dad's Tragic Flaw," and presented it in Darrell's graduate course. None of the fifteen students liked my title, and as usual, their comments were varied and contradictory, but most comments were thoughtful and some were useful. A few students turned back my essay with no comments, making me wonder if they had read it and to wish I hadn't spent the money to photocopy twenty-five pages for them.

Darrell wrote comments throughout the paper and typed a detailed response. In part he said:

This is a strong piece of writing. It could also be a much longer piece of writing. There were dozens of places where, I think, you could have been more specific. As the piece rolls on, you tend to summarize more than you do early on. . . . I feel as if you have a long book on your hands here. It's certainly compelling enough to hold our interest. For me it was intriguing to see the earlier essays in the context of this one; that is, . . . they work in this context more powerfully than they work alone.

Any questions, let me know.

Darrell

I reviewed Darrell's comments and hoped there was some way to finish the essay quickly. I glossed over the idea of writing a book. I was thinking about finishing five essays and some poems and getting my degree. I talked with Darrell after the next class. Our conversation ended with: "Are you suggesting I insert my other essays into my last one? Make one long essay?"

"Yes, and add to it. I guess I'm suggesting an autobiography."

"But, I have my thesis almost done; this would require starting over and writing for a year or maybe two," I said.

Darrell shrugged and smiled—I stood there wondering if I would ever feel like writing again.

My Mother Says I'm Buried  
in the Wasatch Mountains

JAVEN TANNER

She said it was me,  
lying in the palm of her hand,  
four months in the making.

Her body was still in tremors  
from the small shock  
of passing a dark nebula

onto white sheets:  
the exquisite cramps, and the collapse  
so slight it might have happened

miles away. I was gone,  
a lazy stillness  
in my already blue eyes. Even so,

she took care that the water  
was warm, that each fold was washed  
of pinkish gel

and black clots of blood,  
that I was dry and swaddled  
in one of the cloth napkins

used only on special occasions.  
She placed me in a shoe box—  
Nike I hope, the child of Styx—

*Tanner: Poems*

and walked me into the woods.  
She found a space  
among the stiff sage

and the common larkspur,  
opened the earth with bare hands,  
and replaced her unfinished work.

Two for Samuel Beckett

I. Bethesda

We never see the angel coming,  
just percussive agitation on the pool,  
pockmarks without rainfall,

or stuttered wakes shouldering the air.  
We watch the blind,  
their visceral listening,

sifting the uneven murmur  
of withered and halt,  
ready to lunge at each

medicinal trickle.  
Since Jesus came through  
there has been much discussion

about the logistics of rising,  
taking up one's bed, walking.  
We saw the old man do it,

but with thighs stung by urine,  
flies coating a smear  
of pus and blood on stone,

and open sores generating maggots,  
clarity dulls, simple faith  
requires qualification.

And how much does the angel notice?  
He has his work:  
stir the surface, ascend.

We don't doubt he knows the purpose—  
some relieved, others afflicted.  
And we don't deny

there is security in suffering,  
always knowing what and where,  
waiting for the troubling of the water.



## 2. The Widow Woman's Son

He couldn't remember death.  
And he doubted  
he'd get another chance,

*Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her  
Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams  
And our desires.  
—Wallace Stevens*

now that the wasting flesh  
of the harvest hung in traces  
throughout the orchard.

He kept his eye on the curvature  
of the earth and waited  
for signs from the ravens.

"The women were foolish," he said,  
"upstairs laughing, spontaneous milk  
from the ceiling—

all of it gone now. Good."  
At night he sat in the parlor,  
straining at the small pant of a moth

ruining itself on a single flame.  
"Mother," he said, "thy son  
still liveth." Dawn came again—

another handful of meal,  
a little oil. He scratched his thigh  
and knew it would not rain.

"The women were foolish," he said,  
"but spring then, and I watched  
as swatches of daylight slid

over their shoulders. The yellows,  
soft blues, so slight they vanished  
as they touched the skin."

## You Taught Me White

STACY MOISANT

You taught me how to see  
the color white and the many shades  
it can come in—

Sometimes dry and just there,  
the way your name in English means  
“cottage by the water,”

other times damp, hanging, soft on my face,  
the way my name in Scandinavian  
means “my beloved.”

*Moisant: Poems*

## Your Hands

The way your thumb, your fingertips, trace me.  
I always know where your lips are moving to next,  
as if asking that way, with your hand—my throat,  
jaw, across my cheek, finally my lips—  
your fingers always leading.

You’ve discovered that when you take my hair  
between your fingertips, it uncurls  
from my shoulderblades to my waist,  
and you linger there longer—  
truth you create with your fingertips.

## Coming to Birth

SUSAN ELIZABETH HOWE

I imagine those above us  
still in a garden, gauzy  
mist softening their sight.  
They wrap themselves in flimsy,  
see-through bodies, tender,  
though they finger secret lumps  
starting in curves or folds  
and wonder what the other spirits hide.  
They want to push, jostle into existence  
those incipient wads  
of pain, but fleshless blows  
glance off like balloons  
that children swat.  
And so the souls look down,  
off their perfect plateau, to see  
us, fighting and exposed.  
Jealous, they line up for secrecy  
and skin. They're after liver  
and spleen where angers can condense,  
muscles to striate with remorse.  
But they're stunned by the watery schuss,  
the birth canal, the spill  
into flesh so dense and tight.  
The world swims up fuzzy  
in their eyes. Flailing  
their new arms, they know only  
to fear another fall. Isn't this  
how we all come—the infant's body

*Howe: Coming to Birth*

reconfiguring anger in desire?  
We want to be blanketed, bound,  
to turn our faces  
to the delicious breast.

## Prevailing Winds

CAROLYN HOWARD-JOHNSON

My flight to LA banks away from the Wasatch.  
I am struck by souls invisible from 20,000 feet,  
nuclear detritus in their veins and mine,

these, my people, drinking clean,  
working hard, living ancient, now casualties  
of that coldest war that never was.

My husband's examination, fine. Strong  
heart, lungs. But the blood. Poison,  
insidious clock—and fear,

the hardest, meanest warrior—were foisted  
on us. We desert people were nothing  
to those who wasted Nevada's sand,

planned prevailing winds from Yucca Flats  
that cooled our faces to sour our cells.  
Tumorseeds. Stones of distrust.

## The World's Lap

LANCE LARSEN

The spirit keeps wanting to float off into Italian  
frescoes, dissolve into acacias,  
fall lightly like dust into the Indian Ocean.  
Meanwhile the body, tired mule,  
pushes the grocery cart through Perishables.  
The math is simple.  
Spirit + body = a sadness machine.

Subtract either spirit or body and you're left  
with a story  
problem for actuaries.  
Guillotines make permanent separation a snap.  
Ditto famines and plagues,  
ditto waves if you try to cross  
the ocean without holding fast to a floating object.

But how to keep the machine happy—  
supply it with live clams and dead auteurs?  
Dance it through corn mazes  
in the Midwest? An owner's manual  
would help, but how does one translate  
the Upanishads of the clavicle,  
and where do you add oil in a sadness machine?

Once in a San Jose park, on vacation, I asked  
my daughter, Where are we?  
She looked up at me: *My dolly sits  
on mine lap, I sit on yours lap, you sit*



*on the chair's lap, the chair sits*  
*on the world's lap. There are a million*  
ways to say California. Only a few promise rest.

## Co-Conspirators in Early Autumn

We could have passed as refugees from a lost  
century—in other words, father

and daughter. Above us a cavernous October sky  
begging to be ruined by awe. What is tumbling

water but contemplation on fast forward?

*Bird leaf*, she said, and dropped a feather in my hand.

Death: Aspen  
(October 1989)

JIM PAPWORTH

Late October. Once again  
aspen stand white arms and hands  
reaching to the stars for color  
and for the sounds of space, like rumors,  
thumb-sized trunks, huge trunks, all  
hooked in the root net of the mother tree.  
An explosion of white-bodies,  
a planet of trees  
whose gold leaves slather,  
tongues or flames  
licking new air.

A woman leaves this life  
in a pain and a body like fire,  
brilliant, white, thin, coaxed  
into crossing over  
into night, a silent glove  
she enters without fanfare,  
each finger a life counted sure.

October is a silent month  
full of bird migration  
and insects dying by the millions.  
Rivers turn cold, rocks grow silent,  
and everywhere the pragmatic  
ratchet of squirrel talk  
echoes through the trees.

*Papworth: Death: Aspen*

In the beginning  
she came to me often—  
in dreams, in thoughts that closed  
around me, in noise our sons made,  
in silence when I was ready  
and listening—a messenger,  
an angel maybe, something like a touch  
on my shoulder, but lighter, a breeze,  
a noise barely heard,  
a bird without wings.  
I caught myself turning  
to see her vanishing just out of reach,  
slipping between the two worlds  
where she lived, the one carnal,  
the other like a bird burning  
ethereal and hot,  
etched beyond some flimsy veil  
I could almost see through.

Spring arrives.  
I sip freely,  
water slides down my throat.  
Some of the trees bend like the backs  
of old horses, the weight of snow  
curvature of spine and thought,  
but always the upright vision  
towards the sun, always the straightening.

Listen for the Lord. His voice  
rises with the trees. His body  
clings to ours. He waits  
in the trees, His skin like the skin  
of the aspen, His arms held out for us.  
Rise. We are  
the trees, the birds.

## Magnified Callings

RODELLO HUNTER

The Sunday School class I taught was hardly a job at all since I went to Sunday School anyway. The lessons were repetitions of all the hundreds of Sunday School and Seminary lessons I had heard. In these classes one talked of Church history, the lives of the Prophets (Mormon Presidents), the Bible, *The Book of Mormon*, the Mormon settling of the west, and the lives and treks of the pioneers. These were Mormon pioneers. So far as a Mormon boy or girl is concerned there are no other pioneers. Except for the courageous and fruitless trek of the Mormon Battalion, there was not much interest in this work for me.

Primary began right after school adjourned on Tuesdays and lasted until about five o'clock. With Relief Society beginning at one o'clock on three Tuesdays of the month and running for a full day on the fourth Tuesday, Primary from 3:30 until 5:00, and MIA again at 7:00, Tuesdays as well as Sunday are almost entirely Church days.

The other days of the week are not neglected by the Church. The Latter-day Saint passion for meetings to plan meetings to plan meetings is one that is moaned about throughout Mormondom. And those who should attend each meeting are mightily exhorted to be there so the 100 percent attendance quota can be met. I dislike meeting quotas for the sake of the quota. I dislike attending a meeting just to be marked

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Rodello Hunter (1920-2005) used her Mormon upbringing to write *A House of Many Rooms* and later wrote of her life as a member of the Church in *A Daughter of Zion*, which was published originally by Alfred A. Knopf in 1972 and reprinted by Signature Books in 1999. The above excerpt comes from chapter eight of *A Daughter of Zion* and is reprinted with Signature Books' permission.

as a digit in an attendance record, but I went to the meetings along with the others because I liked basking in the warm sun of approval, and was reluctant to be one of the backsliders who brought down the percentage. It was humiliating to stand up with the mere thirty of Lincoln Ward's attending officers and teachers and be put to shame by seventy of Fairmont Ward's bench-filling attenders when we were counted by the Stake clerk at the monthly Officers and Teachers Meeting.

For each class I taught or for each organization to which I belonged I attended four to six meetings every month. Before Relief Society, Primary, and MIA there was a prayer meeting for the officers and teachers. The officers often had prayer meetings of their own. There were preparation meetings for each class where you were given helps for teaching, or if you were an officer, advice in solving problems or planning programs. And there were fireside meetings after Church on Sunday nights. There were also private planning meetings you had to attend because you had been assigned to the food, entertainment, or decorating committees for various auxiliary functions.

The meetings are so many and varied that the Church has declared one night a week for parents to stay home with their families. This is Home Night and if it weren't for that, some active Mormon parents would meet their children only at mealtimes, if then. It is a common saying that the bishop's son or the stake president's son is the worst boy in the ward, and I wonder if it is because he is expected to be the best, or if it is because his father is so busy with the affairs of the ward that there is no time left for his home.

There is one great advantage to all these meetings. It ties the individuals from the wards into the Mormon Stake Family. I grew to know most of the names and all of the faces of people, not only of those in our ward but of active members in all of the Granite Stake. In many cases I learned to know the people behind the names and faces, and found myself being drawn tightly and warmly into the vast striving Mormon Clan.

Shortly after you have accepted a position in any level of the Church organization, you are called one evening to be "set apart." This intimate

and impressive little ceremony usually occurs in the Bishop's office. The Bishopric, which includes the ward clerk or clerks, is there as well as other people who are assuming new positions.

In turn, a member of the Bishopric places his hands upon your head and you are set apart for the work you have been asked to do. The blessings of guidance, inspiration, health, and energy are asked for you. Usually you are "given" various "gifts." Once when I was being set apart, I was given the gifts of discernment and perception—so I would be able to see into the hearts of other people, know their unspoken wishes, desires, and meanings, and would have the capacity to understand. Perhaps it is the power of suggestion, but I have seen people blessed with such gifts develop them to an astonishing degree.

You are also told to "magnify your calling." This means to work hard at your job, to use whatever means you have to make it a good work, and if you did this, you would be blessed in many ways. I don't think I did much magnifying in Primary and Sunday School because I thought of Primary as an affliction and taught Sunday School only as a favor to the Bishop—but I loved working in Relief Society and Mutual.

The group of fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds in YWMIA were called Mia Maids. This was a class that up to this point had been run by the girls. And they counted coup on any number of teachers whom they had driven from the class by their inattentive rudeness. My daughter Sally was a member of this class.

"What do you mean they try to see how many teachers they can get to quit? I hope that you are not acting up in that class."

"Oh, it's sort of a game, Mom. You know, some of the lessons are dull, and you *have* to go to get your 100 percent award."

"If I get any reports of you being rude, it will be a sad day for you." But teachers of Church classes are not prone to report unruliness, and I heard nothing more. Then I was asked to teach the class.

"It's rather a difficult age group," the MIA president told me, "but we thought perhaps you might take it because you have girls that age." She indicated my duty clearly.

So I took the class and for the first two weeks found teaching an

impossibility. Just being heard was impossible. The girls were shrill, inattentive, and pointedly uninterested in me or anything I might have to say to them. One night, I'd had enough. I slapped my lesson book down on the table.

"I am not going to waste my time preparing lessons to which you do not listen," I said angrily. "I don't give a damn"—they gasped—"for your 100 percent certificate. If you can't behave, you won't be allowed in this class, and I'm willing, no, I'm eager to tell your parents why. Tonight I came to the classroom early and waited for you. I am appalled at the din you made coming down these halls. You've been taught that this is the House of the Lord. If you think that it is, treat it with the respect it deserves. If you don't think it is, you'd be better off spending your time somewhere else."

Someone started to answer back about being made to go to Church, and the interruption, justified or not, infuriated me.

"After this, in this class, you will wait until you are given permission to speak. You will wait until I am through. It's a good thing that the Lord loves you a lot more than I do, and that He has a lot more patience than I do, too, because if I were the Lord and you raced and screamed in my house as I've seen you do in this one for the past two weeks," I paused dramatically, "I'd strike you all dead!"

It hadn't come out just as I thought it would. I groaned inwardly at my angry melodramatics, and waited for the girls to titter.

But they didn't. The room was quiet. And in the quiet, I picked up the book and went on with the lesson. I had no more discipline problems. My girls were responsive and cooperative, and there is nothing so delightful as an interested, expressive teenage girl.

Every month, we had a surprise Tuesday, but the girls did not know which night it would be. On these nights, we celebrated the birthdays of the girls who had been born in that month with birthday cakes and gifts. I did not encourage 100 percent attendance, but they all came.

Non-Mormon girls came, too. I remember one especially. She was the daughter of a Fundamentalist. (An offshoot group of the Church that still practices polygamy.) I felt such great pity for this girl, who wore high-necked, long-sleeved, unfashionable dresses. I didn't think



she would be allowed to come often, and she was not. I guessed that her father, who was reported to have four wives, was afraid that she would be turned against "the principle" if she attended our classes.

The girls told me with greedy honesty that they came every time because they didn't know what would happen, what treat there would be, and they didn't want to miss anything.

Because so many Mormon girls marry in their late teens, the Gleaner class had only one lonely member, Sara Curtis. My class combined both First and Second year Mia Maids, usually taught in separate classes, so the Bishop asked me if I would like to have Sara as an assistant.

"It would solve two problems, Sister Hunter. Sara would be drawn closer to the other girls, a badly needed teacher would be freed for another class, and you can probably use help with your big class."

I was pleased to have her and my pleasure increased as time went on. She didn't give the lessons; she was shy about taking charge, but she was close to the other girls in age and filled with suggestions about things that would interest them. She tirelessly worked on favors, parties, and refreshments. She ran errands and kept a beautiful class history book bound in pale blue silk. The book later won high praise from the MIA General Board. When I left the class for the Mutual presidency, I was given the book. I took it out of its box just the other day to refresh my memory for this chapter.

We had guest speakers: young beauty operators to show them how to pluck their eyebrows, the ways to roll their hair, and how to apply makeup; women whom they admired from the necessity to use deodorants no matter how often they bathed, and of homemaking, flower-arranging, and etiquette. A friend of mine who was a registered nurse spoke to them of personal hygiene. When our lessons were on chastity, instead of skipping around with "keeping oneself pure" and the "sins of the flesh" they'd heard about innumerable times before, our family doctor came and talked to the girls. He didn't hedge. He told them of the results of promiscuity and venereal disease. He put the subject on an individual and very personal level. He was a handsome young man, and he impressed them. He told them that "sex was too little to hold a boy for long and too much to give" and he explained why.

I expected some repercussions from a parent or two, but there were none. Girls that age are intensely interested in sex and very shy about revealing their interest, but it was obvious that they thought that was the best class they had ever attended. "Ooh, I sure would have hated to miss that!"

After that evening, if they had questions, they asked them. We set aside a portion of every class for questions. Sometimes I was both shocked at their lack of knowledge and at their directness in revealing it—and themselves. I thought it sad that they could talk with me so freely, and not with their own mothers. But at that age, mothers and daughters are worlds apart. I felt I was closer to mine than most, but I suspected that it was because in the MIA classes I was teacher and friend, rather than mother—though it did not escape me that my girls asked few questions and instead listened attentively to the answers to questions the other girls asked.

There was one girl in my Mutual class who had become a great worry to her parents. The Bishop was worried about her, too. I cannot describe the situation in detail without infringing on her privacy, but she was physically precocious, and she had certain social problems of which her parents were aware, but which it was plain to see would lead her into some painful situations. I worried about her, but of all the girls in my class, I could talk to her least.

There is one thing in which everyone has a universal interest and in which teenage girls are avidly excited: what the future will bring. I doubted that Carmella was any different than any other teenage girl, so we had a party for the girls at my house, and during the evening I read all their futures—in their palms.

I knew nothing about palmistry, but I didn't have to. What I wanted to tell these girls couldn't be seen in their palms by the most accomplished mystic. It was an exhausting evening for me, I suppose because it was such a hard stretch for my imagination. I read fourteen or fifteen palms that night just to be able to talk to Carmella privately and give her some truths about life that I could not tell her in any other way.

"Your hand shows a passionate and loving nature," I said. "Look! Here and here, crosses that show disaster. These are warnings," and I went on

to give her the warnings without mincing words. It worked. She took the advice I "saw" in her hand, and she changed. The change was noticeable in her home and certainly in her relationships with other girls—in that long, palm-reading session, we discussed all of her problems. Carmella was one of those girls who had come to Church with reluctance and because of force. Now I could sense her eager interest in the classes, and I was further rewarded with Bishop Trauffer called me in one day to talk to me in the quiet, appreciative way he had.

"Sister Hunter, I thought I should thank you for what you've done for Carmella. What has worked the charge? We've all tried with her. Her mother and father—you know what fine people they are. All of us in the Bishopric—it was to no avail. We think you've worked a small miracle. How did you do it?"

I thought it better not to answer that I hum-hawed and tried to think of something. "The girls," I said, which was very true, "the girls have all helped. They've included her. They've asked her advice. They've gone out of their way to be sweet and friendly."

"Well, whatever it was, the Bishopric and her parents want to thank you."

I left his office feeling guilty and wondering what he'd have said if I told him I'd used a form of witchcraft. Or perhaps, I eased my conscience, it had been simple psychology. And then I eased it further. Wasn't there something in the Scriptures about using whatever was at hand, questionable though it might be, for the greater good? I thought and thought, but all I could come up with was: "It is better that one man perish than a nation dwindle in unbelief."

## The Eyes of Babes: A Historical Survey of LDS Children's Media

RANDY ASTLE

Despite the ubiquity of film and media in the lives of modern Latter-day Saint children, there has been, to my knowledge, no attempt to evaluate, criticize, or historically contextualize media works developed specifically for Mormon youth. This essay does not claim to completely remedy this situation, but rather simply attempts to briefly sketch the progress of radio, film, and electronic productions by, for, and about LDS youngsters—hopefully to help prepare the way for more vigorous and specific studies that will, in turn, help improve both the quality of new productions and the informed consumption of children's media by LDS parents, teachers, and leaders of children and adolescents.

Nineteenth-century LDS parents and teachers used the primers and hymn collections of the day, and theology was mixed with secular subjects in the network of Church-run schools in pioneer Utah. The Primary, the Church's official organization for the religious instruction of children, was formally organized out of a grassroots effort in 1878 and was initially closely linked with these weekday institutions. At the same time, the concept of a literature specifically devoted to youth was developing out of the Home Literature movement of the 1880s and '90s, with authors such as Nephi Anderson and Susa Young Gates publishing in periodicals like *The Juvenile Instructor*, which began publication in 1866. In time this journal changed its name to *The Instructor*, an adult magazine that featured information for teachers; as of 1902 it was supplemented by *The Children's Friend*, written for the children themselves. Both magazines were supplanted in 1970 by *The Friend*. Other areas of LDS children's media would grow primarily from these literary efforts.

When the movies came to Utah around 1900, children and youth

were likely among the most fervent patrons—particularly after the nickelodeon boom of 1905—despite the moral qualms of many adults. This was the case throughout the nation, but there is no way of knowing to what extent Utah followed national trends.<sup>1</sup> The earliest films made in the state were scenic shots and travelogue-type ventures, which were appropriate enough for children but not necessarily geared toward them. This was also true of the Church's early forays into filmmaking, such as the apparently family-friendly epic *One Hundred Years of Mormonism* (1913), which began with an extensive depiction of Joseph Smith as a boy.

The first Church-sponsored productions that dealt with youth as a primary subject were the documentaries of brothers Shirl and Chet Clawson in the 1910s and '20s. The Clawsons spent the better part of these decades making newsreels, intertitles, and advertisements (often starring their own children), but their passion was making short visual records of Church leaders, members, and events; by default, many of these featured children. Their film of the June 9, 1928, Primary 50-Year Jubilee Parade in Salt Lake City included many shots of marching children, floats, and celebrants, but the Clawsons also filmed children attending general conference, outings at the Great Salt Lake, and other events. The Boy Scout program, adopted by the Church in 1913, became a prominent subject. The Clawsons filmed numerous events, such as the annual Boys' Day Parade held each spring, and they accompanied at least one major caravan, from Salt Lake City to the newly created National Parks at Bryce Canyon and Zion, in July 1920. This production was one of their longest known films, and they may have recorded other similar excursions. The majority of their footage, however, was lost on October 23, 1929, when their Salt Lake City studio caught fire, killing Shirl and severely injuring Chet, who thereafter quit filmmaking.

No major film work for children was undertaken in the LDS community for roughly two decades, but throughout the 1930s and '40s two activities—institutional film criticism and radio programming—prepared the ground for future motion picture work. Church film criti-

<sup>1</sup> A summary of contemporary studies of children's film patronage in the silent era is found in Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment*, 26–29.

cism came primarily from *The Improvement Era's* "Editor's Table" and the long running section "Lights and Shadows on the Screen." The latter item ran from the early- to mid-1930s with a combination of indigenous and national criticism. Surprisingly nuanced reviews have had a long tradition in the Church, with the Social Advisory Committee in the 1910s and '20s, the MIA Motion Picture Committee in the 1930s, and Deseret Book's LDS Film Council, which screened and reported on films from 1948 until well into the '50s. Each of these gave special attention to the needs of children—concern about youthful cinema patronage was the primary motivator for the Church's involvement with film exhibition (the ubiquitous "ward movie night"), a program that began in the late 1910s—and the *Era* regularly published suggestions about how wards could accommodate children, both in terms of appropriate titles and in the particulars of holding special screenings such as Saturday matinees. In late 1929 the MIA Community Activity Department launched a course of study of the movies that gave particular attention to the needs of children ("Course of Study"). Throughout the decades, the *Era* and *Church News* regularly published lists of recommended children's films, with a broad range of educational and entertainment titles and a surprising deference to children's maturity and ability to digest fare that more conservative organizations might have deemed inappropriate.

The Church's use of radio was formally inaugurated with the launch of the station KZN on May 6, 1922, from the roof of the Deseret News building, perhaps the most obvious example of how LDS broadcasting grew out of LDS journalism. The station soon became the Church-owned KSL, and its primary offerings, beyond those stemming from its national affiliation, were spoken addresses and music provided by the Tabernacle Choir. During World War II *The Children's Friend* began a column by Miriam Taylor titled "We Listen to the Radio," which discussed a broad range of children's radio programming available along the Mormon Corridor; occasional film recommendations appeared in this section as well. In July 1946 Taylor discussed a Primary-sponsored radio program named *The Children's Friend of the Air*, which had begun weekly broadcast on KDYL on June 15 (298). The program took more

than its name from the magazine: like *The Children's Friend*, it created a virtual "Sharing Time" by allowing local children to introduce themselves, read poems, or present their pets. In addition, a cast of three girls and three boys—the Primary Players—appeared every week under the direction of Beckie Thompson. The program was apparently quite popular, and the June 1948 *Children's Friend* announced plans for a television version (253).

Nonbroadcast television had only just come to Utah at the previous April general conference, when KSL Radio used a direct-wire connection between cameras in the Tabernacle and television sets in the Assembly Hall and Bureau of Information. Immediately thereafter, KDYL was Utah's first television station to go on the air (KSL-TV would not be launched until June 1949), and the program *Junior Council* was among the first of its offerings. General Primary President Adele Cannon Howells was credited with pushing this adaptation of *The Children's Friend of the Air* into the new medium. As with the radio program, this official sponsorship was a central characteristic; it was not uncommon, for instance, to refer to *Junior Council* as "the Primary Television Show." Olive Milner directed and Jim Baldwin produced, and the show featured a cast of four children and one adult. Again, local children came in, pets in tow, to enliven the production, making it a virtual interactive community for the large percentage of Primary children who lived within its broadcast range. The show ran until at least 1960, with several sets of cast members. Like all television programming from this era, it was broadcast live with no way to record the episodes before the inventions of the kinescope or videotape, so much of it is lost today.

*The Children's Friend of the Air* and *Junior Council* constituted the bulk of LDS children's media throughout the 1940s and '50s, but youth issues occasionally began to resurface in cinema proper with the return of institutional Church filmmaking. Frank Wise and LaMar Williams filmed a massive Boy Scout jamboree as part of the 1947 Utah Centennial celebrations, but the majority of these productions came after the establishment of the Motion Picture Department at

BYU in 1953. "Judge" Wetzel Whitaker, the studio's founder and director, could only make films when commissioned by Church auxiliaries, and the Primary was not a frequent patron. However, between the Primary's occasional commissions and those for other organizations, BYU was able to make quite a few productions that, if not intended for juvenile audiences, at least featured children as subject matter. The first was *The Happy City* (April 1955), a nineteen-minute Christmas film about the Primary Children's Hospital. The lead character was played by a budding child actor, but the rest of the cast consisted of actual patients, a conspicuously realistic beginning for Whitaker's career as a child director.

The Sunday School became the most common patron of films about children, regularly requesting motivational pictures about the vicissitudes of church teaching. *What Is a Sunday School Class Worth?* (1954), made principally by Frank Wise before joining BYU, was a documentary about teacher Ella Stratford and her young class. It is remarkable primarily for its sequel, *Divine Influence*, made in 1971 as the studio's last for the Sunday School. For this film Wise again found Stratford and her now-adult students, allowing them to reminisce and evaluate how her teaching had affected their lives, making this the most significant longitudinal film effort in Church history. Other, more routine, fiction films at BYU included titles like *A Teacher Is Born* (1955); *Feed My Sheep* (1957); *Teacher, Open My Eyes That I May See* (1959); *A Time for Sowing* (1960); *A Day for Justin* (1969); and *What about Thad?* (1970). The YM and YWMIA also commissioned films for adolescents, from mundane documentaries that explained ballroom dance steps to the landmark work *Pioneers in Petticoats* (1969), a film made in honor of the YWMIA centennial that Whitaker described as the closest to a feature they had ever made ("Lion House Cameras Roll" 7).

In 1964 the Church's growing television work came under the umbrella of Bonneville International Corporation. Their first effort in children's television was apparently modeled on *Junior Council*. Entitled *47 Happiness Way*, this program premiered on KBYU Television on Christmas Day 1969. Created and directed by Frederick L. Bluth, it too



featured a young Sunday School class—the teacher played by Edna Anderson—but without the local children's interaction and with the addition of animated portions, including a boy named Dean. At least fifty half-hour episodes aired through 1972, the year in which the Church's Public Communications Department was created. One of that department's first acts was to create, through Bonneville, a series of family-centered public service announcements called the *Homefront* series. This proved highly successful at improving the public image of the Church, and in 1983 Bob Giraldo created a spin-off series for children titled *Homefront Jr.* This featured musical messages on honesty, peer pressure, and other youthful problems, and aired nationally on Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons. *Homefront* has been highly decorated, but it was a *Jr.* spot that won the series' first Emmy, in September 1987. In the meantime, Bonneville had found additional success in a series of longer television specials, all of which were intended for family viewing and many of which featured children in prominent roles; foremost among these were *A Christmas Child* (1974), in which a stewardess stuck in Salt Lake City on Christmas Eve helps a lost boy at Temple Square, and *Mr. Krueger's Christmas* (1980), a now-famous film in which a lonely widower wins the heart of a young girl.

In the meanwhile, many Church members had independently undertaken their own children's productions, both religious and secular. In 1972, for instance, Joan Young created a French-language television show in Maine called *La Machine Magique*. Young herself starred, along with several puppets, and the show ran for several years. In the 1980s T.C. Christensen arguably became the most important filmmaker of Church-related children's productions. In 1980 alone he created two of the finest films in the canon, *Joseph Smith: The Man* and *The Mouths of Babes*. In their simplicity, these two works are also arguably the best films of his entire career. The former features Lethe Tatge—perhaps best known for her leading role in the BYU film *The Mailbox* (1977)—telling a group of children about Joseph Smith. Though a fictional production, her autobiographical narrative, which she frequently recounted in real life, was true. While *Joseph Smith: The Man* features some of the finest child performances in LDS film, today it is less

known than *The Mouths of Babes*. This documentary, made on spare 16mm film stock, features LDS children in Utah and southern California answering basic gospel questions (note the daughter of director Kieth Merrill who also starred in his *Mr. Krueger's Christmas* that year). Christensen's high shooting ratio, necessary to create as amusing a film as this, resulted in a masterfully insightful, funny—one boy repeatedly poking another's eye in Primary was enough to make Christensen's laughter shake the camera—and sometimes poignant film, as when a young African-American lad innocently expresses gratitude that his father holds the priesthood. Today Christensen is probably best known for his cinematography and films for adults—his *Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration* (2005) was the first film shown at Temple Square to receive a parental warning—but children have remained a prominent component of his work, whether in secular feature films like *Bug Off!* (2001) or short devotional works like *A Pioneer Miracle* (2003), and he ranks among the finest children's directors in the Church.

Other Latter-day Saints' efforts used noncommercial distribution methods, such as a 1977 documentary made by Phil Tuckett, an NFL filmmaker, about the Primary in his small Atlantic City branch. Such small-scale productions typify all of LDS cinema from the 1970s to today, especially after the advent of VHS and home video equipment, and children's films were no exception. Amateur video work grew tremendously in the 1980s and '90s; many Primaries, groups of children, and especially youth groups and high school seminary students took the camera into their own hands to record skits, Sharing Times, programs, and other events. For instance, in 1989 the West Jordan 57<sup>th</sup> Ward (Salt Lake City) recorded 165 minutes of children performing stories from the Book of Mormon, and in 1993 the Kearns Utah West Stake created a longitudinal film about the children's study of temples, climaxing in a temple trip that was the first for many of the children's parents. Similar examples abound. Much of my initial exposure to filmmaking came at a Salt Lake City high school seminary in the 1990s, where we often made videos in class or for Christmas, graduation, or other special events.

Indeed, the Church Educational System, a latecomer to the use of

media when compared with the Sunday School and MIAs, quickly became one of video's foremost practitioners. After a lengthy foray into still filmstrips—the most popular being the *Tom Trails* series begun in 1968—the CES began transferring then originating these single-shot-by-single-shot productions onto video. Full motion was added, and by the mid-'80s the "seminary video" was born: short, didactic pieces based initially around a continuing narrative and then later around doctrinal concepts in the scriptures. The titles are legion and continue to be made by the CES, LDS Motion Picture Studio, and Church Audiovisual Department. Every seminary and institute classroom is fully video-equipped, and cassettes and DVDs are provided to volunteer instructors teaching at home or in meetinghouses; the constant use of these materials makes high school seminary perhaps the most video-saturated element of LDS culture.<sup>2</sup>

The Primary and other Church organizations also took up the video gauntlet, sometimes for training and motivating leaders but increasingly to communicate with the children themselves. Examples of the former area include titles like *How to Teach a Song to Children* (1986) and the five-part satellite broadcast/videotape *Primary Leader Training* (1987); similar training pieces were created for the Young Women in 1991 and the Primary in 1994, and smaller examples are again numerous. The Church has also repeatedly created filmstrips, training videos, and other media against abortion, child abuse, and child pornography, both for capacitating LDS leaders and reaching out to other organizations. Also, yearly guidelines and examples of children's sacrament meeting programs were released on video in the 1990s in both English and American Sign Language, an important component of the Church's effort to use video technology to aid its deaf members.

Institutional videos for children followed in the wake of *Joseph Smith: The Man*, which had been purchased by the Church. A compilation video from 1986 includes titles like *Baptism: A Promise to Follow Jesus*; *A Boy and the Power of God*; and *Come with Me to Primary*. The segment *Teacher, Do You Love Me?* was later released individu-

<sup>2</sup> For a complete history of the CES's use of filmstrips and video see Hess, *The Evolution of Media in the Church Educational System*.

ally with added footage of President Ezra Taft Benson singing "I Am a Mormon Boy" to a group of children. Many of these and similar titles also found their way onto the two-volume *Family Home Evening Video Supplement* released in 1987. In addition, this compilation featured original short films about familial and doctrinal subjects including integrity, friendship, missionary work, and the Book of Mormon. Indeed, scriptures proved to be fertile territory, with video series such as *Book of Mormon Stories for Children* (1983) and *Bible Stories for Children* (1985), both with still illustrations and narration, and the *Book of Mormon Reader*, a video designed to aid young children with literacy. The Church's most recent significant children's video is *Sharing Time with President Gordon B. Hinckley*, essentially an eight-minute monologue with cinematic illustrations broadcast via satellite in June 2002 and subsequently released on VHS and DVD.

One final area of the Church's work for youth must be mentioned, and that is in its charter membership in the cable television station VISN (Vision Interfaith Satellite Network, now known as the secular but family-friendly Hallmark Channel). In addition to the many archived sermons and choral performances tapped for this outlet, Bonneville created original material, including the programs *Families Are Forever* and *Center Street*. This latter show, begun in June 1992, was a half-hour news and lifestyle program for teenagers of various Christian backgrounds. Topics included obvious moral issues such as drugs and premarital sex, but also included fairly random secular subjects such as nonwestern music or selecting a college; two of its most popular regular features were the Food Lady and the Ultimate Science Guy. *Center Street* is an interesting example of an attempt to engage a youth audience in the general television marketplace; its juxtaposition of the hip and the sacred—like the opening credits' rock music over quickly edited, swirling images of the Salt Lake Temple—makes for quite a different experience than the standard seminary fare.

In addition to the work done by Bonneville and the institutional Church, the 1990s were the era in which independent LDS cinema became big business, again through the medium of video. Many children's VHS titles revolved around music, such as *The Children's Video*

*Songbook*, a two-tape collection of musical instruction, *Primary Song Sing Along* with still artwork by Jennette Guymon-King, and *Hoobee Doo' Bee*, which featured ethnic arrangements of Primary songs along with an actor in a giant bee costume.

But the undisputed leader in children's video in this decade was the Living Scriptures Company. Founded in Ogden, Utah, in 1974 by Jared F. Brown and Seldon O. Young, the company had long produced audio-cassette dramatizations of the Bible and other media. They entered video production in 1985 with T.C. Christensen's *Tour of Israel* series, but it was in the late 1980s, with the introduction of animation, that the company came to prominence. A partnership was formed with Latter-day Saint Richard Rich, fresh from directing *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) and *The Black Cauldron* (1985) at Disney, and they began with a series of half-hour videos in 1987 on the Book of Mormon, followed by the New then Old Testaments and finally a secular "Heroes" series featuring characters like Abraham Lincoln. Rich always directed, aided by Lex de Azevedo as composer and Orson Scott Card and Brian Nissen as screenwriters; the actual animation was performed in South Korea. Though the videos were marketed exclusively through direct orders of entire series, they proved popular and allowed the company to return to adult documentary by the mid-1990s.

Occasional films cropped up in the late '90s, but nothing approached the mass of material that has appeared in the last few years. After the theatrical release of *God's Army* in March 2000, LDS cinema in general took on a new legitimacy. It is therefore surprising that, despite the Church's emphasis on families (and the accompanying number of potential juvenile patrons), no LDS theatrical film has been geared towards youth beyond the vague family friendliness of films like *The Other Side of Heaven* (2001), although it should be noted that, as of this writing, Chris Heimerdinger is about to release an adaptation of his young adult novel *Passage to Zarahemla*. Still, it can be argued that the primary characteristic of the current era, for children and adults, is not in theatrical features but in a boom of video sales, as shorts, fiction films, and documentaries have all increased in prominence. This surge resulted from two additional events roughly coinciding with *God's Army's* release: the

emergence of DVD as the primary home video medium and, in the case of children's films, Big Idea's incredibly successful *VeggieTales* cartoons, in which computer-animated vegetables reenact biblical stories with a healthy dose of silliness; these sell at mainstream and Christian video outlets, including Deseret Book. Mormon videos quickly followed, and it is likely that children's films that have thus been the most successful—though least-known—entities of the post-*God's Army* era.

It is difficult to rank or compare modern children's films competing at LDS bookstores, but mentioning a few titles may help give a lay of the land. Perhaps the most successful enterprise has been the *Liken the Scriptures* series, produced by LightStone Studios in Provo, Utah. These are a series of live-action musicals co-directed by Dennis Agle and composer Aaron Edson in which modern Primary children with overactive imaginations musically reinvent stories from the Bible and Book of Mormon. The series began rather humbly, but installments have grown in length and polish and the studio has not only taken over most of its own distribution efforts but has also reformatted many of its biblical pictures for a general Christian audience. Excel Entertainment and HaleStorm Entertainment, both involved in theatrical LDS films, have also created secular children's videos such as *Down and Derby* and *Howdy Town*, respectively, but *Liken* remains the greatest LDS-specific live-action venture of recent years.

Two animated series apparently going head to head in style and subject matter are *Junior's Giants* by Excel and *Max's Attic* by Covenant Communications (which had previously produced the computer-animated *Because Sunday Is Special* [2001]). Both series feature imaginative protagonists learning about specific Christian characteristics in order to overcome trials. Both are computer animated and both have been affiliated with publishers and bookstores: Deseret Book and Seagull Book, respectively. Deseret Book had acquired Excel in 2004, and it has since purchased Covenant as well. As of this writing it is too early to judge the effect this will have on these and similar productions.

Perhaps the most original innovation in all of LDS cinema is the advent of videos for the very young. Stemming more from mainstream productions like *Baby Einstein* than the ironic *VeggieTales* cartoons,



these productions are aimed at toddlers and infants before they even acquire motor and verbal skills. The competing series *Baby Mormon* and *My Little Saints* each combine *Baby Einstein's* emphasis on colors, shapes, and music with gospel- or Church-oriented material. *My Little Saints* is advertised as a way to bring spirituality into children's daily lives, emphasizing the developmental value of gospel-oriented themes along with visual and aural stimuli, and one *Baby Mormon* title, *I Am a Child of God*, includes foreign languages and images of global cultures to help babies learn that all people are children of deity. For both companies, hymns and Primary songs are interspersed within the more traditional classical music.

As with all of LDS cinema, it is likely that digital technologies and interactivity will play an increasing role in coming years. Already DVDs are moving in this direction, as with the innovative series *FHE on DVD*, an interactive program designed to supplement family home evenings: one tagline reads, "Just add refreshments." Each disc includes animated stories, interactive questions, Primary songs, and gospel lessons. Themed titles include *Tithing: Mariah and the Book Sale* and *Prayer: Where Are Ben's Glasses?* CD- and DVD-ROMs take interactivity even further. Seminary students, for instance, can now be entertained while learning their scripture mastery verses in Lincoln Hoppe's DVDs of *The HearSay! Game* (one for each standard work, or CES course of study) produced by Three Coin Productions. Parents and Primary leaders have a wealth of online and disc-based material to help with crafts, Sharing Time and Achievement Days activities, musical instruction, and other activities endemic to Primary. The Primary page on the Church's website ([www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org)) features streaming video of General Authorities speaking about children, and it is only a short time before these websites—like those of Big Idea, Nickelodeon, and other kid-oriented media companies—become navigable for the children themselves. It is likely that digital technology will soon take us back to 1946, with all LDS children able to interact with each other, pets in tow, on a global scale.

Finally, it should be noted that with the increased presence of Latter-day Saints in the film and entertainment industries more and

more Church members are working on mainstream children's productions. Don Bluth—director of well known animated films such as *An American Tail* (1986) and *The Land Before Time* (1988)—is perhaps the best-known example from recent decades, but the growing cadre of LDS filmmakers includes writers, composers, puppeteers, animators, editors, performers, and others, one of the most recognizable being Kristy Glass, a New York City-based model who stars in Every Baby Company's *Eebee's Adventures* for infants and toddlers.

Mormon children are in essence no different from their counterparts in other faiths. What is remarkable is the extent to which Church leaders and filmmakers have gone, often at great personal investment or institutional expense, to document, entertain, and educate LDS youth. That said, there is also a degree of paucity in LDS children's media. Productions are fewer than they could be, and too often children's media is relegated to the back pew, not considered in serious discussions of either LDS cinema or LDS culture. Given the primacy of media in modern society and the importance of youth and gospel education in the Church, efforts in children's media education will prove to be critical resources in the next few decades. It is gratifying, therefore, that Brigham Young University film professor Dean Duncan is one of the foremost authorities in children's media in the United States, and his Children's Media Initiative ([cmi.byu.edu](http://cmi.byu.edu)) already provides a trove of film reviews and other aids for parents and teachers. As such discussions proliferate, we will not only improve our use of media with children but will transform our very concept of what media is, from an often-feared spiritual liability to an invaluable resource in the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that all our children may be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of our children (see Isaiah 54:13).

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## Tyler Ford's *Anxiously Engaged* and the Intrusion of Mormonism in Mormon Cinema

ERIC THOMPSON

"The least of things with a meaning is worth more in life than the greatest of  
things without it." Carl Gustav Jung

Upon initial viewing, Tyler Ford's *Anxiously Engaged: A Piccadilly Ro-  
mance* (2005) is a difficult film to classify in the academic sense as it  
suffers from a number of ideological flaws. The purpose of this piece,  
therefore, is to investigate the symptoms in an attempt to isolate and  
identify the central malady.

The story focuses on a young Mormon named Carson Welles (Jaelan  
Petrie), a ranch-raised Montanan working at an international beef com-  
pany in the heart of far away London. The film begins when Carson's  
engagement to Lucy Armstrong (Katie Foster-Barnes) is derailed when  
her grandfather (James Green) refuses to give his blessing unless Car-  
son first finds a husband for Lucy's older sister, Jema (Sophie Shaw).  
Carson's attempts to set Jema up with a suitable suitor meet with con-  
tinual disappointment until he introduces her to his supervisor, Nigel  
Backman (Tom Butcher). While sympathetic at first, Nigel's motives  
for dating Jema seem to be rooted in his overarching scheme to em-  
bezzle the company, which happens to be owned by Lucy and Jema's  
grandfather (it's never made clear what the embezzlement scheme has  
to do with Jema). Eventually, Nigel frames Carson for the crime, which  
leads to a showdown in which Carson proves his innocence and finally  
marries the right girl.

The title is itself an unwitting invocation of what turns out to be  
perhaps the film's primary ailment. The double entendre is, of course,  
descriptive of the predicament in which Carson finds himself. Engaged  
but unable to marry, he is certainly anxious. But the Mormon audience



will unmistakably recognize the term from LDS canon. "Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness" (Doctrine and Covenants 58:27).

This throws the story into something of a new light as Carson is understood to be anxiously engaged in the good—indeed righteous—cause of finding Jema a husband. Clearly, scratching at this conceit unearths the smell of Mormonism. To a culture that idealizes marriage as much as Mormonism, matchmaking may very well strike one as a good turn. If there's joy in bringing converts into the waters of baptism, how much greater must the joy be in bringing them into the bonds of matrimony? For this reason, more than any other, Carson begins to question his testimony. "Sometimes" he confides to his secretary, Alice (Gwyneth Powell), "I feel like everything I've been taught is a lie." Yet at this point in the film, Carson's only real conflict is brought on by his inability to introduce Jema to a decent marriage prospect, let alone marry her off. It's curious that something as alien to Mormon doctrine (and practice) as matchmaking, in effect, should cause such a grievous crisis of faith. This is but one instance in which a Mormon cultural ideal (if it can indeed be called that) takes precedence over Mormon doctrine within the film's subtext.

The film also features the blithely repeated but decidedly non-Mormon mantra, "You can't help who you fall in love with." This is not a foreign concept to Mormon media. *Saturday's Warrior* (Bob Williams, 1989) contained the subplot of two premortal lovers pledging to find each other on earth and eventually doing so. Like much of America, Mormon culture embraces the notion of fatalistic romance, despite the absence of such from Mormon doctrine. For this reason, it seems odd to find a genre so steeped in the doctrines of fate as romantic comedy to be as readily and prevalently available as it is in Mormon cinema, especially given the prominence with which the faith treats the subject of agency.

Yet it is precisely because the film is a romantic comedy that the audience is expected to forgive its predeterminism. Rom-com is the capstone genre of omniscience. Matchmaking can't be bad if all it's doing

is ushering along a predestined—even righteous—conclusion. In fact, as long as God's predetermined will is met, matchmaking must be a heavenly endeavor. Ford (and co-writers Petrie and Scott K. Brown) cements the concept with Lucy's subplot. Lucy's character is far from evil, imperfect primarily by the fact that she's not the girl Carson "can't help [but] fall in love with." Ford makes her obliquely shallow, casually accepting Carson's proposal, and committing the Mormon cardinal sin of under-appreciating the solemnity of marriage. Toward the end of the story, Ford dismisses the potential conflict between the two sisters by having Lucy back out of the engagement. Responding to Carson's assertion that she's too posh to survive a mission, Lucy does just that. But before she goes, she commits one final, redeeming act of goodness: She encourages Jema to marry Carson. Her righteous act of matchmaking serves as the proof that Lucy is indeed worthy to serve the Lord.

Any defense of Ford's choice to glorify matchmaking by hearkening to such matchmaking classics as William Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and Jane Austen's *Emma* is undermined through comparison to those exact works. In *Anxiously Engaged*, it is Lucy who more closely resembles Shakespeare's Kate, criticizing Carson's proposal and belittling his cowboy dress. Jema, on the other hand, is as mild-mannered and sweet as *Taming's* Kate is wild and shrewish. In this case, the shrew Carson must tame is Lucy, and he does so by *not* marrying her. This seems like a decidedly Mormon reinterpretation. From a cultural standpoint, what could be more taming to a young LDS woman than being refused marriage? Likewise, Austen's *Emma* is a selfish character whose machinations into the love lives of others lead her on a path of remorse, epiphany, and eventual maturity. In contrast, Ford's characters are rewarded for their matchmaking efforts. Carson finds the "right" girl while Lucy makes herself worthy for service in the mission field.

Even the film's climax delivers a uniquely "popular" ideal that stands in contrast to Mormon principles. When Nigel frames Carson for embezzlement, Carson protests all the way to the slammer, claiming that he can prove his innocence. But when a mysterious benefactor bails him out, Carson snugs his cowboy hat onto his brow and immediately

tracks down Nigel for a physical confrontation outside of the law. This proof of innocence steers much closer to the iconic vigilantism of Hollywood cinema rather than the law-abiding principles espoused by the LDS Church, especially as it invokes the classic Western imagery of earthy cowboy vs. foreign cattle baron. Carson's legitimate innocence is later offered to the authorities in a manner that suggests it was available all along, making the confrontation utterly moot. Why was it therefore included? Probably because it was assumed that the audience wanted a good guy vs. bad guy showdown, even if it wasn't crucial. But just like the aforementioned symptoms, while this conclusion may be wanted, it is far from "Mormon."

But if the ideologies of matchmaking, fatalism, and vigilantism are only symptoms of the problem, what is the problem itself? The answer is obvious. The problem is Mormonism.

The problem with Mormon cinema is that it seeks the critical legitimacy of popular cinema while firmly decreeing its "Mormonness." The simple fact that escapes many Mormons—and it is reflected in Mormon cinema—is that Mormons are not normal people, as defined by popular culture.

Popular culture has established a particular template for "normal"; and anything outside of that template, in terms of story, cannot exist without a reason for doing so. Typical film reality takes it even further. The notion that good guys always win, that spies are always beautiful, or that promiscuous women must be punished with death in slasher flicks are all part of the established template for story reality as defined by popular culture. Granted, this template shifts with time. Contemporary good guys smoke nowhere near as much as they did in Hollywood's Golden Age. Happy endings don't involve marriage nearly as much as they used to.

But, by and large, exceptions to the rule *are* the rule in storytelling because they add meaning. For example, in a film where the main character is clearly defined as a homosexual, the audience will assume that the character's sexuality has a significant bearing on the story *and interrogate the meaning of that choice*. But the audience doesn't question when a character imbibes alcohol. That's because normal people—as

defined by popular culture—enjoy a drink from time to time. We may lament lasciviousness in the media, but we don't question it within the context of story. That's because normal people—as defined by popular culture—engage in premarital sex. Think about it. If you watched a movie in which a character was saving him- or herself for marriage, you may find that refreshing, but you would also want to know why. Is it a religious choice? Does this person believe in a particular kind of love? Is popular culture a turn-off? You would want the meaning. Why? Because it's outside the template of "normal" for characters in modern storytelling to make that choice, just as it's outside the template for characters to be gay. The same holds true for Mormonism. If a Mormon character exists within a film, it means that Mormonism is somehow relevant. The Word of Wisdom, eternal marriage, Joseph Smith, missionary service—viewers will search for that aspect of the religion, existing beyond the cultural pale, that made it impossible for the story to be about anyone other than a Mormon.

A brief study of three Hollywood movies may serve to illustrate the problem further. Clint Eastwood's *A Perfect World* (1993) tells the story of a kidnapped boy who develops a close bond with his captor as they flee the authorities in 1960s Texas. The film begins on Halloween with the young Phillip pining to join the other children as they engage in trick-or-treating. But his mother's staunch observance of their religion—Jehovah's Witness—prevents him. Later, after he is kidnapped, Phillip chooses to steal a ghost costume from a department store and continue traveling with the escaped convict Butch (played by Kevin Costner) rather than go free. When Butch finds out that Phillip has never gone to the circus, eaten cotton candy, or trick-or-treated because of his religion, Butch is shocked. "You know, Phillip," Butch says with conviction, "you have a [expletive] red, white, and blue American right to eat cotton candy and ride roller coasters." He stops their flight long enough to take Phillip to a house where, at gunpoint, he provokes the hapless owner into providing the double service of provisioning their trip and fulfilling Phillip's fondest wish, trick-or-treating. In the film's tragic climax, a dying Butch agrees to release Phillip on the condition that his mother take him trick-or-treating every year,

let him eat cotton candy, and drink beer when he's older. "My mama's not bad!" Phillip sobs. "She gives me those things." Butch gently rebukes him. "Don't kid a kidder, Phillip." As in *Anxiously Engaged*, the character's religion is identified from the beginning. But in *A Perfect World*, Phillip's religion serves as a major part of the foundation of the surrogate father/son relationship, granting a bittersweet subtext to almost every scene.

Even when identity is intentionally discarded, as it is in *Suture* (Scott McGehee and David Siegel, 1993), it is in no way disregarded. The very simple premise revolves around twin brothers who find themselves reunited after being separated at birth. Vincent (Michael Harris) has lived a lavish, albeit underhanded life while Clay (Dennis Haysbert) is a simple construction worker. In order to escape his extra-legal entanglements, Vince duplicates himself by disguising Clay and subsequently sending him off in a car that's been rigged to explode. But Clay survives, and as doctors try to piece his amnesiac life back together, he is led to believe that he is, in fact, Vincent. In the end, the real Vincent returns to finish the job and is killed by Clay, who casts aside his remembered identity in favor of his brother's. With that explanation, it would seem that the film is an exploration of class issues. The reality is that the film is actually about race. Michael Harris is a white man while Dennis Haysbert (24's President David Palmer) is decidedly black. As characters ignore the obvious difference between the "twins," the audience is forced to confront the absurdity of color-blindness. In *Suture*, identity, though ignored, is still everything.

The final example is one of romantic comedy's very own. In *Keeping the Faith* (Edward Norton, 2000), Rabbi Jake Schram (Ben Stiller) and Father Brian Finn (Norton), are divided by the return of their childhood friend Anna (Jenna Elfman) into their devout lives. Each carries a torch for Anna, and each is equally torn over her; Jake because she's not of his Jewish faith and Brian because of his Catholic vow of celibacy. The delicious irony of this setup is that both Catholicism and Judaism move in and out of pop culture's parameters for "normal" at their leisure (meaning that characters in movies can be Catholic or Jewish without a meaningful reason for being so). But in

this case, the film uses the particularities of each religion's dogma to establish and develop the plot.

And therein lies *Anxiously Engaged*'s fatal flaw. At no point is Mormonism ever significant to the plot. In fact, the film overcompensates, trying so hard to render Mormonism "normal" that it confuses the average viewer by delivering a Mormonism that ultimately doesn't matter. The result is a film full of scenes that depart from the plot in order to casually explain Mormonism. In one scene, Carson is compelled to stay overnight in a Scottish pub. While there, the locals watch a soccer match on television and celebrate a goal scored against England by singing their national anthem. Carson tells the barkeep that the LDS Church has a hymn with the same tune, then sings the lyrics to "Praise to the Man" underneath the Scottish patriotic swell. But at no time does the significance of this hymn, or indeed Joseph Smith, come to bear. Does it exist to bolster Carson's faith? Resulting scenes provide no answer.

In another scene, Nigel comes to church on a day when Jema is teaching Sunday School. As the only church scene in a film where Mormon characters feature prominently, it figures to be significant. Jema asks Nigel to read from the religion's signature book of scripture, the Book of Mormon. "Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men" (Alma 48:17).

As with the Scottish pub scene, the payoff from this scene never arrives. Who is Moroni? Why is it significant whether or not men are like him? What about him would cause the powers of hell to be shaken? The film never provides the meaning because in Mormon culture, it doesn't have to. Thus, what could be poignant is now pointless.

Yet another scene stands apart from the rest of the film. After Carson is framed for embezzlement, he is taken to a holding cell where he's incarcerated with a potentially violent jail mate of dubious mental stability who screams continually about England's "proper laws." Ford's directing deviates from the established course with handheld cinematography, choosing to have the characters now look directly

into the camera (a choice eschewed at any other point in the film). Given the light-hearted context surrounding the rest of the film, the scene is mildly unnerving. When Carson is released on bail, he urges the jail mate to call the missionaries. The jail mate, much calmer now, promises to do so, even going so far as to sit back into a beam of sunlight and profess to see the light.

The humor notwithstanding, the purpose of the scene—and in particular, the jail mate—is not immediately apparent. Why is Carson sharing the gospel? At no time in the film up to this point (the act three turning point, no less) has the notion of sharing the gospel been addressed, let alone had any bearing on the story. It may be important to Mormonism, but it's not important to the film. Here, again, Mormonism intrudes on the film as the story literally pauses to allow the audience to see a slice of LDS culture that has heretofore been irrelevant. The proof comes later, when the jail mate shows up at Carson and Jema's secular wedding questioning why they can't be married in the temple. Alice curtly explains that in England, the state only recognizes civil marriages and that the temple wedding will be held later. The man's features light up with discovery as he excitedly exclaims, "Proper laws!" The payoff, indeed the reason for the character's very existence, is not to add anything of significance to the plot or support the development of the main characters but simply to explain to the audience the peculiarities of certain Mormon marriage practices.

And this is ultimately the final diagnosis for that which plagues the film. The advancement of the non-LDS concepts of matchmaking and fate combined with the fact that Mormonism shows up at the expense of the plot lead one to the inevitable conclusion that the film's ailment is the very religion that the filmmakers would like to propagate. This doesn't mean that the film vilifies Mormonism. It means that Mormonism doesn't belong in the film.

"The writer can choose what he writes about," says Flannery O'Connor, "but he cannot choose what he is able to make live." Ford, for all his probable good intentions, has cobbled together pieces of Mormonism in an effort to pay homage to his religion but failed to give those pieces any meaning. And a story without meaning is merely a body without life.

## Contributors

RANDY ASTLE has served as *Irreantum's* film editor since 2006. He recently co-edited with Gideon Burton a special issue of *BYU Studies* devoted to LDS film, which won a Special Award from the Association for Mormon Letters. He is currently enlarging his history of LDS film from that issue to book length and works as a writer and filmmaker—increasingly on works for children—in New York City.

DARIN COZZENS grew up in Powell, Wyoming. He has been a finalist for both the Iowa Short Fiction Awards and Sarabande's Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction. For the past six years, he has taught at Surry Community College in Dobson, North Carolina.

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SUSAN ELIZABETH HOWE is a professor of creative writing at Brigham Young University; her areas of interest include contemporary American poetry, women's literature, and modern and contemporary drama. She is a contributing editor of *Tar River Poetry* and served for eleven years as the poetry editor of *Dialogue*. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Her first collection of poetry, *Stone Spirits* (1997), won the Charles Redd Center Publication Prize. It also received the Association for Mormon Letters award in poetry for 1998. Susan lives with her husband, Cless Young, in Ephraim, Utah. "Coming to Birth" originally appeared in *Prairie Schooner* Vol. 78, No. 1 (Spring 2004).



LANCE LARSEN's second poetry collection, *In All Their Animal Brilliance* (2005), won the Tampa Review Prize and three other awards. A professor of English at Brigham Young University, he received a 2007 NEA fellowship in poetry. He is married to painter and mixed-media artist Jacqui Biggs Larsen. "The World's Lap" originally appeared in *Agni*, "Co-Conspirators in Early Autumn" in *American Literature and Commentary*.

LAURA MCCUNE-POPLIN lives in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, with her husband, Dave. She teaches information literacy classes at Emerson College, where she received her MFA in creative writing. In her spare time, Laura likes to write, hike, bike, and travel. "Deviations" is a chapter from her novel, *Entertaining Angels Unaware*.

HENRY MILES retired after a career in the Foreign Service. During his eleven years in Latin America, he served as counselor to three mission presidents while his wife, Carol, served on mission boards and as Relief Society president. After retiring, both took degrees at BYU. They have five children and twenty grandchildren, the oldest just returned from a mission. Henry spends his writing time on family narratives and personal essays.

STACY MOISANT's love for writing began with a third grade assignment; all the way through school she slept with pen and paper. Stacy is enjoying watching her poems being published while recovering from a supposedly terminal illness. Stacy credits her Heavenly Father, family, friends, and even strangers for inspiring her and feels that writing is a large part of what saved her life.

JIM PAPWORTH has been teaching at BYU—I since 1988; besides finding time for an occasional poem, he also helps spouse Anne raise Mack (3) and Tavenor (1) and an older brother, Parker (19).

In addition to essays and stories in *Irreantum*, PAUL RAWLINS has published his fiction in *Glimmer Train*, *Southeast Review*, *Best of Writers at Work*, with stories also to appear in *Image* and *Epoch* magazines.

Winner of a PRISM International Short Fiction Award and the Utah Arts Council Award, Rawlins also won the Flannery O'Connor Award for his first story collection, *No Lie Like Love* (Georgia). He currently works for Ancestry Publishing, where his job duties keep changing but typically include editing, writing, and achieving a calm, zenlike state in afternoon meetings that is not to be confused with sleep.

JAVEN TANNER's chapbook *Curses for Your Sake* was published in 2006. He graduated with an MFA in acting from the Old Globe in San Diego, where he was awarded the Craig Noel Fellowship. Javen worked as associate artistic director of Handcart Ensemble and was named Best Actor at the 2007 New York International Independent Film Festival. Javen has taught acting at New York University's Playwrights Horizons Theatre School, Brigham Young University, and is currently (2007) serving as the chair of the theatre department at The Waterford School. "The Widow Woman's Son" originally appeared in *The Midwest Quarterly*; "Bethesda" in *Curses for Your Sake*; and "My Mother Says I'm Buried in the Wasatch Mountains" in *Three Candles*.

Western Montana native ERIC THOMPSON has a bachelor's degree from Montana State University in Media and Theater Arts with an emphasis in writing. Eric is an award-winning screenwriter, a published columnist of socio-political commentaries, and a periodical contributor of academic film criticism to *motleyvision.org*. An actor, a teacher, and a lover of all things "country," Eric lives in Los Angeles with his actress and ballroom dancer wife, Esther Ellsworth-Thompson.

KATHERINE WOODBURY's stories have been published in a variety of science fiction and fantasy magazines, including *Andromeda Spaceways*, *Space & Time*, *Talebones*, and *Leading Edge*. She teaches English at two local community colleges and teaches and tutors online. In her free time, Katherine watches *Star Trek*, *Columbo*, and *Dr. Who*; takes books out of the library (and forgets to return them); and posts to her blog: [www.katewoodbury.blogspot.com](http://www.katewoodbury.blogspot.com).



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## IRREANTUM

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The Association for Mormon Letters is currently accepting manuscripts for its eighth annual fiction contest.

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## 2009

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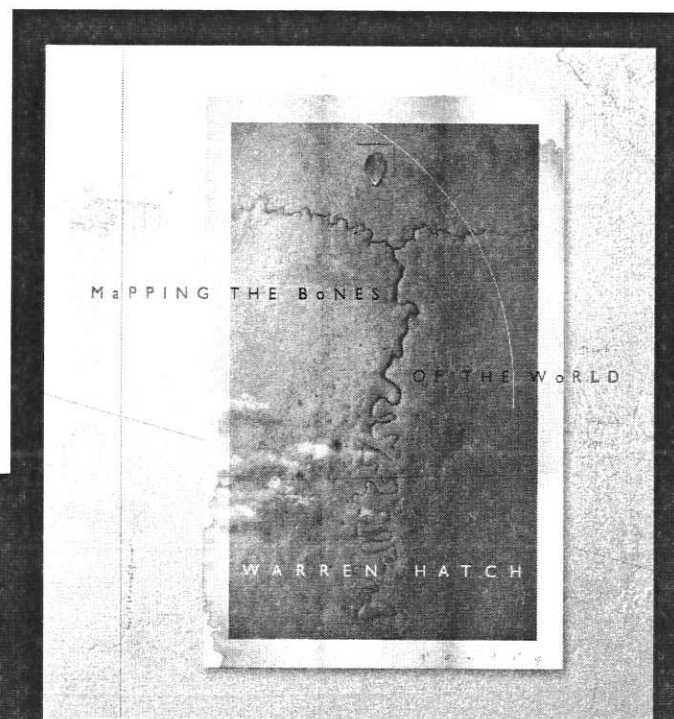
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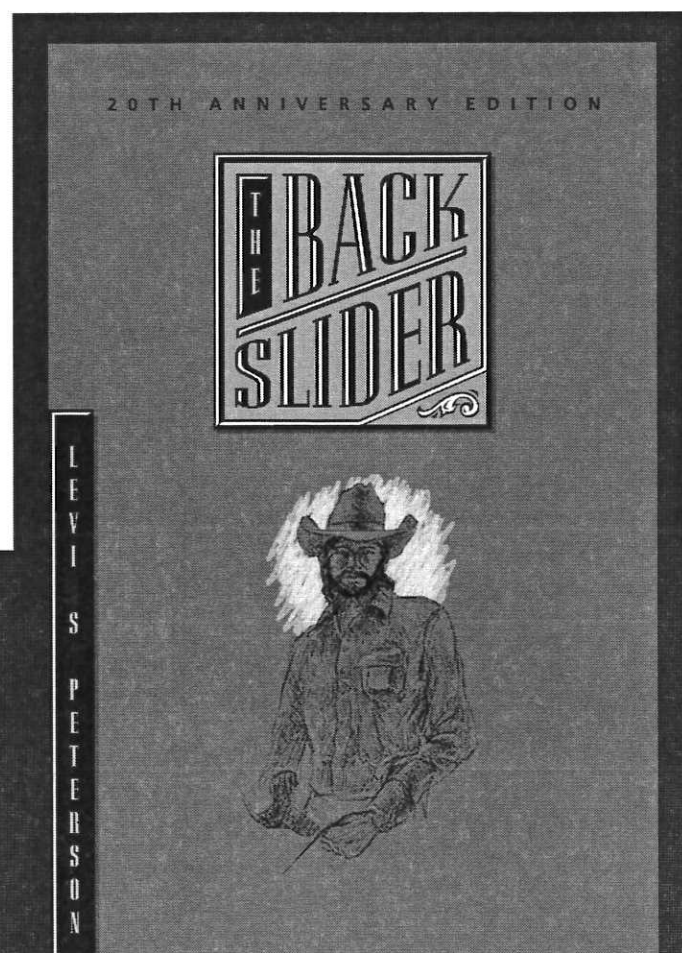
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